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KING LEOPOLD II'S EXPLOITATION  
OF THE CONGO FROM 1885 TO  
1908 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

by

STEVEN P. JOHNSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in History  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Ezekiel Walker

## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that King Leopold II, in his exploitation of the Congo, dealt the Congo a future of political, ethnic, and economic destabilization. At one time consisting of unified and advanced kingdoms, the Congo turned to one completely beleaguered by poverty and political oppression. Leopold acquired the Congo through unethical means and thus took the people's chances away at self-rule. He provided for no education or vocational training, which would stunt future Congolese leaders from making sound economic and political policies. Leopold also exploited the Congo with the help of concession companies, both of which used forced labor to extract valuable resources. Millions of Congolese died and the Congo itself became indebted through Belgian loans that were given with no assurance they could ever truly be paid back due to the crippled economy of the Congo. With the Congo now in crippling debt, the current president, Joseph Kabila, has little incentive to invest in reforms or public infrastructure, which stunts economic growth.<sup>1</sup>

For over a century the Congo has been ruled by exploitative and authoritarian regimes due to Leopold's initial acquisition. The colonization from Leopold lasted from 1885-1908, and then he sold it to his home country of Belgium who ruled the Congo from 1908 to 1960. Belgium helped prop up a dictator named Joseph Mobutu or Mobutu Sese Seko who ruled from 1965 to 1997. Afterwards he was overthrown by the Kabila family who has continued the exploitative rule and has made no significant efforts at democratization or reforms. Thus the ethnic conflicts,

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<sup>1</sup> David K. Leonard and Scott Straus, *Africa's Stalled Development: International Causes & Cures* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 28.

political oppression and economic woes that the Congo is facing today are inevitably linked to its Leopoldian past.

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Patty and Steve Johnson, for making me the person I am today. I will always try to emulate your kindness, generosity, diligence, optimism, and loving nature.

To my sister, Stephanie Johnson, for always being there for me.

To my cousin, Chad Johnson, for being my best friend.

To my extended family and friends, for their unwavering love and support.

To my high school English teacher, Mark Huaman, for sparking my interest in learning.

To the authors, Barbara Kingsolver and Joseph Conrad, who wrote *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Heart of Darkness*, respectively. Both works have influenced me to write this thesis.

To those in the Congo who continue to strive for a better future in the wake of a colonial past.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

Some have argued that European imperialism has benefited the countries they have colonized.<sup>2</sup> For instance, one example is that India had more transportation after two centuries of British rule. Yet, they fail to explain why those infrastructures like trains were built, which in the case of India was to extract as much raw materials as possible thus setting the country back centuries in economic growth. The Congo had just as much a civilization as most European countries during the 16<sup>th</sup> century all the way up to the horrendous period known as the slave trade. Yet, Europe saw Africa as the ‘Dark Continent,’ mysterious and unexplored. As Adam Hochschild, in his book *King Leopold’s Ghost*, one of the most seminal studies on the Congo, states:

Ranulf Higden, a Benedictine monk who mapped the world about 1350, claimed that Africa contained one-eyed people who used their feet to cover their heads... In 1459, an Italian monk, Fra Mauro, declared Africa the home of the roc, a bird so large that it could carry an elephant through the air.<sup>3</sup>

These types of outlandish beliefs only served to dehumanize Africans and remove any thinking of its people as engaging in a civil society. Knowing the history of the Congo before King Leopold II ruled is important because it shows a country with a rich history complete with chiefdoms and kingdoms that acted as local governments.

The Congo, contrary to European assumption and thought, was a complex society linked by chiefs, kings, and trade. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, in their book *The Rulers of Belgian*

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Kennedy, “The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism 1846-1914,” *Past & Present*, No. 125 (Nov., 1989), 186.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 6.

*Africa, 1884-1914*, say that “An African Aristotle would have found in the Congo every conceivable form of constitution, from small ‘stateless’ neighborhood societies to powerful monarchies.”<sup>4</sup> This is important because it demonstrates that African societies did have hierarchical government systems before King Leopold II swept in with claims of civilizing the Congo. For example, the chiefs in the Congo had similar powers to a state mayor or governor. They settled disputes in the community and even collected tributes from villages in the chiefdoms in the form of game and crops and sometimes received prized tributes like elephant tusks or ostrich feathers.<sup>5</sup> These tributes are like modern day taxes, and helped fund the growth of the kingdom. Although the chiefs did not wield as much power as a king, they did maintain cohesion and organization between clusters of villages, thus building connected communities like our modern day towns or cities. Yet all of the strong chiefdoms and kingdoms combined could not stop the scramble for Africa taking place in the late 1800s. With this scramble came one of the most ambitious, manipulative, and exploitative kings in the world.

King Leopold II of Belgium had searched for colonial acquisitions to increase the prestige and power of Belgium in a time of European expansionism into Africa and Asia. After having failed to acquire notable colonies like the Philippines, Leopold looked to a place that he would not have to bribe or fight with a major European power to attain, and that was the Congo. Lying in the center of Africa and roughly seventy to eighty times the size of Belgium, King Leopold II knew that he had to tread carefully and gain the recognition from the other European powers before colonization could occur. Therefore, Leopold ushered in a philanthropic campaign stating that he wanted to civilize the Congo. He created the International Association of the

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<sup>4</sup> L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1979), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Didier Gondola, *The History of Congo* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), 14 and 15.

Congo in 1879 to show the world that he wanted to drive the Arab slavers out of the Congo and establish free trade. This smokescreen had effectively deceived Europe and even gained the recognition of the United States.<sup>6</sup>

What King Leopold II actually did with the organization was to send Henry Morton Stanley, a famous explorer, to map out the Congo and take as much land as possible. Stanley was armed with an expedition force and was ordered to bribe and intimidate chiefs, which would be over 400 in total, to have them cede their land.<sup>7</sup> Although the chiefs had no idea of what they were signing since the treaties were in French, their signatures were all Leopold needed to have when the issue of raffling off African territory came up in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. The other major powers, with the understanding that Leopold wanted free trade in Central Africa, allowed him to take his desired territory. Since no major country wanted another major country to have the Congo, Leopold was finally able to gain his first major colonial acquisition, though under his own name and not that of Belgium.<sup>8</sup>

With the approval of Germany, the United States, and the other major powers, Leopold created the Congo Free State which lasted from 1885 to 1908. Instead of promoting free trade and civilizing the Congo as promised, Leopold sought rapid exploitation of the Congo. To aid in this rapid exploitation, Leopold gave land to private concession companies who used any coercive means to maximize profits.<sup>9</sup> Leopold first saw ivory as the main jewel of the Congo since it was in demand and cheap to acquire. However, after the market became saturated with

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<sup>6</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 64, 65, and 81.

<sup>7</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe: Leopold II, the Congo Free State and its Aftermath* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 88.

ivory and it became harder to collect due to the wanton poaching of elephants, Leopold sought another resource to profit off the Congo. With the invention of the pneumatic rubber tire, Leopold had a means to ensure mass profits since the Congo, unfortunately for its native population, had one of world's largest supplies of rubber.

To extract this new highly valued resource, Leopold established the Force Publique, a military force in the Congo Free State that consisted of Belgian officers, meaning no Congolese would have any decision making on how their people were treated. The Force Publique set up bases and forced labor camps to have the Congolese go and collect wild rubber, which normally took all day and many lost their lives climbing up trees to cut the rubber veins for the sap. If the quotas were not met, then villages had to cut off a number of right hands to replace the expected amount of rubber. In addition, the men were forced to work because the women of their village were taken as hostages until they returned with the listed quotas. In 1899, the British vice consul said, "the rubber having been brought, the women were sold back to their owners for a couple of goats apiece, and so he continued from village to village until the requisite amount of rubber had been collected." With the men being forced to collect rubber and the women taken hostage, necessary crops were not being harvested leading to massive famines. Due to large scale murder, famine, disease, and exhaustion from work, the population of the Congo Free State went from 20 million to 10 million. This enormous death toll completely destabilized the Congo and left her dependent on Belgium for food and raw materials.<sup>10</sup>

After the atrocities in King Leopold II's Congo Free State started to become publicized, Belgium felt threatened and paid Leopold to sell the Congo to the state. Belgium annexed the

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<sup>10</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 161, 190, 191, and 233.

Congo from 1908 up to 1960 maintaining Leopold's policies and turning the Congo into a mining economy, minus the forced labor camps. The Force Publique still existed which kept the Congolese under a forceful submission to Belgium.<sup>11</sup> After a series of revolts in the Congo, Belgium finally decided to give them their Independence. The newly formed Democratic Republic of Congo had elected as its Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, but since he sought Soviet help in fighting rebels, Belgium and the United States teamed up and Lumumba was assassinated in 1961, just after two months in office and leaving decades of dictatorship by the Belgian and U.S. puppet Joseph Mobutu. Overall, the result of the exploitation of the Congo by King Leopold II set in motion the ethnic, political, and economic downfall of the Congo that still prevails today.

## **Chapter Layout**

The thesis will have three chapters based on those three main periods of the Congo. Each chapter will have subsections showing how each person or country acquired rule over the Congo, how they set about exploiting the Congo, and the ways they had to suppress growing conflict due to the worsening of the economy and civil liberties. Chapter I will discuss pre-colonial African history and how the Congo's and Central Africa's major kingdoms dissolved as a result of Leopold's rule. Chapter II talks about the ways in which Leopold acquired the Congo, using different people and conferences to gain recognition. Finally, Chapter III will evaluate the exploitation of the Congo by Leopold and the concession companies. Through forced labor,

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<sup>11</sup>Mabiengwa Emmanuel Naniuzeyi, "The State of the State in Congo-Zaire: A Survey of the Mobutu Regime," *Journal of Black Studies* 29 (May, 1999), 674.

Leopold was able to extract billions of Belgian francs while the Congo was left in economic ruin and debt.

## Literature Review

Throughout my thesis, I will mainly use books and journal articles to help explain key points. However, there will be a handful of books that I primarily use due to their notable authors and vast amount of research conducted. The book that is cited by most historians on the Congo and that will act as one of my principal sources of King Leopold II's policies in the Congo is Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*. He discusses how the Kingdom of Kongo, which had consisted of a thriving government, civil bureaucracy and a court system since the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, became part of the slave trade of the 1500's and would be a product of European imperialism ever since.<sup>12</sup> He delves into the sheer brutality in the Congo Free State and Leopold's constricting policies that decimated half of the population. I use Jan Vansina's book *Kingdoms of the Savanna* and E. Jefferson Murphy's book *History of African Civilization* to depict the pre-colonial Central African kingdoms. L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, in their book *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914*, mention the privatization of the Congo through concession companies, the massive public debt unlike other African colonies, and the large trade balance of the Congo with exports far exceeding imports.<sup>13</sup>

Martin Ewans' *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe: Leopold II, the Congo Free State and its Aftermath* examines the lack of an educated society after the Congo Free State due

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<sup>12</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 9, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 216.

to subsidized Catholic schools which only taught religion and Belgian as a second language.<sup>14</sup> Without an educated and vocational trained populace, the people of Congo were not fit for self-rule. Ewans further discusses Mobutu's destabilization of the Congo and how the Congo is still being exploited due to its past history. Along with Ewans, Didier Gondola's *The History of Congo* addresses Mobutu's regime but also the civil wars and the Kabila dictatorship. David K. Leonard and Scott Straus, in their book, *Africa's Stalled Development: international Causes & Cures*, take a look at the enclave mining economy of the Congo that "discourages wealth dispersion and provides an attractive target for rebel groups."<sup>15</sup> With constant infighting, public investment is decreased while the public debt increases. This thesis agrees with their findings and traces them back to Leopold's Congo.

However, this thesis is different from these books because it seeks to highlight the consequences of the Congo Free State that connect Leopold to the Congo's problems since his rule and that remain today. Each of these works generally focuses on one specific area, whether it is pre-colonial Africa, King Leopold II's Congo Free State, Belgium's Congo, Mobutu's Zaire, or the Kabila family's Democratic Republic of the Congo. My thesis will look at how Leopold acquired and exploited the Congo and what that meant for the Congo's future. His use of forced labor and concession companies created a snowball effect that subsequent powers would use against the Congo in favor of profits. King Leopold II and his actions brought about the ethnic conflict, authoritarian regimes, and exploitative economy that would last for over a century.

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<sup>14</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 241.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard and Straus, *Africa's Stalled Development*, 17.



## PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN HISTORY

Although the chiefs and local councils served vital roles in their respective communities, it was the wide-ranging kingdoms that brought these communities together. As Didier Gondola, in his book *The History of the Congo*, states, “the king could always count on the loyalty of a large military force, which acted to maintain peace, suppress internal plots when they occurred, [and] acquire new territories by conquest.”<sup>16</sup> This shows that stability and economic growth were seen as significant. Some of these powerful kingdoms were the Luba, Lunda, and Kongo kingdoms. Although the people in these kingdoms consisted of “farmers, hunters, and fisherman”, the kings held the power of divine right and “were responsible for their subjects’ supernatural as well as secular well-being.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore it seems that the kings served both the roles as a modern day president and pope. As it was Pope Urban II who paved the way for the Crusades in 1095, it is important to note how powerful someone could be with political and spiritual influence. With the increase of trade with Europe, specifically Portugal, these kingdoms were able to conquer other territories using imports like firearms, which could generally wipe out rival chiefdoms or kingdoms that had never before been seen on the African continent.<sup>18</sup> Kingdoms like the Luba, Lunda, and Kongo were common in Africa thus debunking the idea that Africa mainly consisted of tribes and small villages. They existed for over centuries due to balanced political systems that often dispersed the power from the king which created a more efficient and somewhat democratic government.

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<sup>16</sup>Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 15.

<sup>17</sup>Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 47.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 48.

## Luba Kingdom

The Luba Kingdom started around 1500 as a small group of chiefdoms located near the upper Kasai River and the second largest great lake in the world, Lake Tanganyika, which stretches across parts of what are now the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Burundi, and Zambia. Just like the Egyptians and the Nile, the Luba chose to reside near a massive water source that could help irrigate crops and provide for a large kingdom. The social structures and lineages were patrilineal with groups of lineages forming villages. A headman was appointed for each village that also had help from a council to decide on affairs. Jan Vansina, in his book *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, points out that, “Several villages together formed a chiefdom ... and the chiefdom was headed by a *kilolo*, a territorial chief. Several chiefdoms formed a province with a provincial chief, and all the provinces together made up the kingdom.” This is important because it shows how hierarchical the Luba were, with each section or category having their own headman and councils. Vansina also mentions that, “Some chiefdoms were given out for life, others only for a period of four years. In all cases the king could depose a chief.” Therefore the king had complete control over his kingdom and could even depose chiefs from chiefdoms that he granted an indefinite livelihood.<sup>19</sup>

The Luba system for doling out positions throughout the kingdom was all spearheaded by the king himself. He gave out titles to matters of essential importance to keep all of the chiefdoms together in the kingdom. Vansina states, “The most important were: the *twite*, the war leader and the head of an officer corps- the only standing police force in the kingdom; the

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<sup>19</sup> Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1966), 71 and 73.

*inabanza*, keeper of the sacred emblems and the most important provincial chief.”<sup>20</sup> This is significant because it shows the most pressing concerns of the king at the time. Since borders were not as permanent as they are today, wars were presumably fought often for expansive purposes. To safeguard new territories, the king assigned a standing police force, which is remarkable considering that a standing army was held as taboo for colonial Americans after attaining independence centuries later. Although most people in the Luba kingdom had no power in decision making, the king was aware of the importance of a standing army to be able to attack or defend at any moment’s notice.

The title for keeper of the sacred emblems demonstrates the spiritual nature of the kingdom and most other kingdoms in Central Africa. As E. Jefferson Murphy explains in his book *History of African Civilization*, the Luba and other Bantu speaking peoples believed in a supreme creator. He mentions, “The Luba believed that God could be prayed to directly, without the use of intercessor spirits, yet they saw God as distant from man’s affairs.”<sup>21</sup> This is interesting because not even Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century had truly secular governments. The papacy in Rome had full control over spiritual affairs, and praying directly to God and going to heaven could only be achieved if granted by the bishops, Pope, and attendance of the Church. Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation that changed this came centuries later while the Luba had already established that each person could have a personal relationship with God. Murphy further mentions, “Numerous nature and ancestor spirits were believed to have more

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>21</sup> E. Jefferson Murphy, *History of African Civilization* (New York: Crowell, 1972), 189.

relevance to the occurrence of natural phenomena and to individual fortunes.”<sup>22</sup> The Luba, like the ancient Greeks, labeled most occurrences in the real world spirits or gods.

Thus, the supreme creator had little to no impact on events happening on Earth. This is different today in that many people will pray to God for good outcomes later in life or for other friends and family’s good fortunes and health. The Luba seemed to be less theistic and more deistic believing that God gave a free hand to allow everyone to make their own decisions and outcomes in life. The divine right of the king probably had more of a spiritual presence than the supreme creator. The spiritual beliefs of the Luba demonstrate just how far ahead they were spiritually compared to their eventual colonizers in Europe wanting to implant their own style of religion.

The king also made sure to make backup positions in case he came to an early demise. Vansina mentions that another titleholder was the *nsikala*, a position like a vice president who ruled during an interregnum.<sup>23</sup> This would ensure stability, as in with European kingdoms there were always many and often dubious claims to the throne in monarchical systems. Vansina further claims that, “Titleholders resigned at the death of the king who had appointed them and were then either replaced or reconfirmed in office.”<sup>24</sup> It is evident from this statement that stability and security were indeed of prime concerns for the king. If these cabinet positions or advisors were older than the king or ruler, one can assume that these positions were meant to be held for life. The king sought to prevent these titleholders from being subject to manipulation by essentially giving lifelong tenures, and ingeniously saying they must resign if they do outlive

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>23</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, 73.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

him. This gives the next king in line the power to form his own administration or elect efficient or qualified titleholders from the previous administration.

Another important attribute of the Luba Kingdom circled around their philosophy of conquered territories. Usually, in the context of the time period, when a country or kingdom attacked and took control of territories they would impart their way of life to the conquered. This could mean currency, religion, political system, and heavy taxes. This is similar to what Rome did to most of the known world, making the phrase ‘when in Rome do as the Romans do’ ever more popular. Some conquerors are also exceptionally violent, committing mass series of rape like how the Russians literally raped East Germany after World War II. However, the Luba king did not make these changes or commit these atrocities. When the Luba expanded, they took the conquered territories’ way of life into consideration. As Vansina observes, “When non-Luba groups, east or far south of the Lualaba, were conquered later, the chiefdoms would be left to their original chiefs and controlled by one or two Luba villages with a supervisor chief from the central area.”<sup>25</sup> This means that they were just left to their ways and remarkably still able to rule themselves.

It is clear that they did have Luba supervisors watching over the villages or groups, but that could have just been used as a counter measure for insurrection. Murphy also adds on Luba policy, stating, “The central Luba political system set the pattern for the empire. Conquered chiefs continued to rule their villages, but were under the clear control of Luba immigrants. The conquered chiefs were not considered to have *bulopwe* and were heavily taxed.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore the Luba Kingdom is again stressing the importance of stability by having such a peaceful measure

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>26</sup> Murphy, *History of African Civilization*, 188.

of ruling over conquered territories. Murphy mentions something Vansina leaves out and that is that the conquered chiefs did not have *bulopwe*, or a sacred bloodline to lead, hence they could not be titleholders in the Luba Empire. Although, the Luba had some constraining policies on those they conquered, history shows it could have been much worse and the conquered were left in favorable conditions ensuring the stability and security of the kingdom.

The king, though absolute, did even have checks on his authority. Murphy notes that “members of his lineage possessed the quality of “bulopwe,” the sacred right of leadership, and could legitimately organize a revolt if the king became unpopular.”<sup>27</sup> The word legitimately stands out because that would mean that revolt was acceptable by the councils and citizens if the king was unruly, tyrannical, or of any other nature not fitting for his position. Today a revolt or revolution per say would be considered treasonous and put down quickly through the police and military. Thus a revolt, perhaps to the chiefdoms, was just a quicker way than negotiating with a king who far exceeded the limitations of his power. Vansina also mentions this check by saying, “But his power was tempered by the fact that he had half-brothers who might rise against him, supported by their mother's patrilineage, and that they would be backed by the court and the people if he were a tyrant.”<sup>28</sup> Under these circumstances the king was checked with a strongly backed, organized, and legitimate revolt if not ruling up to the standards of his people. It is safe to assume that this would scare any king or leader if such a revolt was codified in their respective constitutions. This demonstrates the political nature of those in the Luba because they would rather revolt than live under tyranny or unjust laws.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, 74.

Due to all of their modernized policies within their own kingdom and for conquered territories, the Luba were able to cover large distances within Central Africa. Murphy states that “It is estimated that KalalaLlunga enlarged his kingdom from some 40,000 square miles, which were inhabited almost entirely by Luba peoples, to about 75,000 or 100,000 square miles, inhabited by at least three or four other major ethnic groups.”<sup>29</sup> This is surprising in that the amount of territory back then would equate to much more now since people have a different measurement or perspective of time. Today, people in cars can travel hundreds of miles in the span of hours, whereas back then it took days.

One must consider how intricate and connected these vast chiefdoms were to interlink and form a kingdom. Imagine having to rule a territory that vast back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and beyond? To put it in perspective, the state of Florida is only about 65,000 square miles and England, a place that ruled almost a third of the world at one point, is only 50,000 miles, almost twice as less as the Luba kingdom. To feed and provide for this large territory, the Luba grew chickens, goats, vegetables, smelted metals into weapons and jewelry which were used as currency, and traded goods for other tools and guns to better protect their kingdom.<sup>30</sup> The vastness and political structure of such a kingdom, in the heart of Africa beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, contradicts any notions of Africa being filled with isolationist type tribes that is often portrayed in modern media.

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<sup>29</sup> Murphy, *History of African Civilizations*, 188.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

## Lunda Kingdom

In many creation stories the Lunda Kingdom began as members from the powerful Luba Kingdom that intermarried with the Lunda. The Lunda Kingdom began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and lasted up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The political structure of the Lunda began as a group of small villages led by, as Jan Vansina states in his book *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, “a council of elders [ciyul] and by a matrilineally hereditary headman [the mwaantaangaand] who was especially responsible for the supernatural well-being of the villagers.”<sup>31</sup> This stratification of power suggests that though there was a king, power was spread out to help rule the kingdom. Much authority lay with the king as the headman in each of these clusters of villages that could only be disposed of by the king. The councils mainly consisted of elders, most likely because they were viewed as the most knowledgeable. What can also be taken from that statement is that the headmen were not only hereditary but matrilineal hereditary which shows that women played an influential role in the Lunda Kingdom. This could also be seen with Native American cultures as some women led tribes and villages. Although these early councils and their spiritual headmen do not seem like much of a governmental system, they made ruling and bringing all of these distinct villages into a unified kingdom easier for the king.<sup>32</sup>

The Lunda king also had a system for collecting tributes or taxes and made a sole position for tax collector. Vansina states that each of these groups of villages were separated into political districts that were governed by a *cilool*, which was a person with no spiritual rights but collected taxes and fees from each district council. Local communities were governed by appointed representatives who worked and raised taxes for a national figure. This demonstrates

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<sup>31</sup> Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, 80.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



the hierarchical structure that is evident in most governmental systems. The king even appointed someone called a *yikeezy* to watch over the tax collector or *cilool* and make sure every transaction is fair.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the Lunda king had a pragmatic process to attain a financial surplus that would keep the kingdom functioning.

Vansina further mentions that the Lunda king had a major role in the election of administrative positions. He states, “The king had sacred attributes, nominated court officials, created new titles, could depose officials of all ranks, and presided over the *citentam* [a national council and court of the highest titleholders].” Therefore the king had total control of his kingdom and could regulate when necessary. In some sense this system does resemble an authoritarian type of regime, with the lack of checks and balances that most modern governments have today. However, the councils and numerous amounts of officials and titleholders do show that the king knew how to make his kingdom more democratic. He had to rely on countless others to keep the large kingdom together. There were religious titleholders, war leaders, delegates, and even officials like the *cibiing*’s who protected the Lunda borders against other kingdoms like the Luba. This is directly similar to the governments of today, which have militaries, border control officers, bureaucracies, and a strong correlation with religion. As a result, the Lunda king was able to make as many officials as necessary, and depose the ones that were inefficient or merely did not suit his own interests.<sup>34</sup>

The Lunda kingdom was also able to succeed through its international relations and its ability to trade with Europe. As noted in E. Jefferson Murphy’s book *History of African Civilization*, the Lunda were able to expand due to trading with countries like Portugal. He states,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 81.

“Trading through intermediaries, Lunda kings secured guns and manufactured goods from the Portuguese in return for copper, gold, ivory, and slaves.” Guns obviously made it easier to expand and conquer vast territory. Murphy adds that they also received plants from Portugal like maize, tomatoes, and pineapples that would feed the expanding kingdom. With farming and harvesting crops, time could be spent elsewhere whether it is innovating technologies, teaching, or building armies to take important territories where rivers, coastal ports, mineral deposits, or other important terrain were located. They utilized the upper Kasai River and controlled much of the present day Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>35</sup>

Due to these technological advances and expansion, the Lunda were able to garner notoriety and respect not just in Africa but in Europe as well. Murphy reports that there was once a visit to the Lunda kingdom by a Portuguese Captain named Antonio Gamitto in 1831-32. The Captain remarked of the Lunda, “We certainly never expected to find so much ceremonial, pomp, and ostentation in the potentate of a region so remote from the seacoast, and in a nation which appears so barbarous and savage.”<sup>36</sup> This is important because it reveals the backwardness that some or many Europeans had attributed to Africa for centuries. As with the mythical idea of the roc bird mentioned earlier, many fabled tales had been told on the return of those who made expeditions to Africa.

The Europeans of course saw strange things that they were not accustomed to but definitely exaggerated stories to appear all the more heroic for having gone and survived the uncharted wilderness so to speak. This statement by Captain Gamitto shows that when presented in front of the king and into the kingdom, they had heard or assumed wrong about the Lunda and

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<sup>35</sup> Murphy, *History of African Civilization*, 190.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

other African cultures. Murphy further notes that Gamitto might have been even more surprised if he found out that the pomp of the king of the Lunda was subservient to a king in western Angola, and certainly other Bantu speaking nations and kingdoms had just as much pomp as the Lunda king.<sup>37</sup> With a greater respect for such kingdoms, trade with Europe increased, though it became one-sided and extinct with the era of colonialism.

### **Kingdom of Kongo**

A famous and powerful kingdom in Africa that exhibits the epitome of Africa's mark in civilization is the Kingdom of Kongo. In 1487, the Kingdom of Kongo, led by a king called the *ManiKongo*, ranged from two to three hundred miles along the coast of modern-day Cabinda to the northern part of modern-day Angola.<sup>38</sup> This is roughly the distance from Orlando, Florida to Savannah, Georgia, or about the vertical distance of a country like Israel. The Kingdom of Kongo lasted for a hundred years and the *ManiKongo* appointed governors for a half-dozen provinces. This demonstrates that in order to have a balanced government that could cover such a large distance the *ManiKongo* distributed the power allowing for more productivity in the kingdom.

Similar to the Luba and Lunda kingdoms, the Kongo had a cluster of chiefdoms that formed into provinces and districts thus making the kingdom. The titleholders are also like the Luba and Lunda kingdoms, with each council, whether village, province, or king's council, having their own set of titleholders to rule. Vansina states that the district officials in the kingdom "carried out administrative duties and were judges in the district courts." This again

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 21.

emphasizes the importance of a judicial system and desire for just laws and fair treatment throughout the kingdom. Furthermore, one of the positions on the *ManiKongo*'s civil service was the *manivanguvangu*, which was the first judge in adultery cases. Therefore, not only did they have an administration and governmental branches but also a sign of a judicial system that decided on cases amid the Kingdom of Kongo.<sup>39</sup>

It is also significant to note that the Kongo had their own aristocracy with everyone without 'mani' in front of their name being excluded. Therefore this shows that there was some type of class system as well, resembling most old and modern economies. As Vansina mentions, the king had officials to supervise the governmental income and fiscal policy, stating, "the income was used to grant gifts to the titleholders at court and sometimes to territorial rulers, for only through gifts could the kings hope to retain an impressive retinue of officials, soldiers, pages, musicians, etc., at court." Gifts could just be another word for salary, as the king was basically paying them for their service like any government pays their members.<sup>40</sup>

The Kingdom of Kongo also had a functional economy. On their production, Hochschild imparts, "Although they were without writing or the wheel, the inhabitants' forged copper into jewelry and iron into weapons and wove clothing out of fibers stripped from the leaves of the raffia palm tree."<sup>41</sup> Writing is most likely absent at this time because in many African societies oral tradition was of great importance, as seen recently with Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. For geography, the kingdom used marching days to measure distance, and for time they used the lunar month. This shows that they were into mathematical and scientific

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<sup>39</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savannah*, 41 and 42.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>41</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 9.

study. The *ManiKongo* enacted cowry shells as the currency and through them collected taxes. This is similar to the Wampum beads that Native Americans used with Europeans as currency in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, kingdoms like the Kingdom of Kongo had similar economies to most other civilizations in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup>

### King Affonso

One king during the Kingdom of Kongo that helped bridge relations between Europe and Africa was King Affonso. This was a name that the Portuguese gave him since he had a sincere friendship with King Manuel of Portugal. Martin Ewans, in his book *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, discloses that, “The Portuguese advised Affonso how best to run his kingdom, trade developed and young Kongolese travelled to Portugal for education and experience.”<sup>43</sup> Although the Portuguese were there for resources, trade was still taking place and a respect between the two kings formed. King Affonso’s own son led an African delegation in 1513 to Rome and was himself declared a bishop. Rome was at the heart of Europe in the time and title of bishop meant respect and acceptance of King Affonso’s Kingdom of Kongo. What all of this means is that before colonization had occurred and the ideas of civilizing Africa had taken form, some European countries had already viewed kingdoms like the Kingdom of Kongo with respect and as equals.

Having grown up with a pro-European education and a strong sense of devout Catholicism due to a Portuguese upbringing, Affonso wanted to religiously convert and

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<sup>42</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 8-12.

<sup>43</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 23.

modernize the Kongo. Vansina states, “Affonso asked for priests, schoolteachers, and masons, and for technicians to help him with military matters.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore Affonso was in the process of trying to improve his kingdom to create a more advanced society with education, masons to learn how to build possible infrastructure and roads, and strategists that could teach logistics and tactics on the military front. With this statement Murphy explains Affonso’s exceptional desire for education:

Schools for the nobility were established in Kongo itself. As befitted a king who was proud, and who regarded himself (and was accepted) as a peer of the Portuguese monarch, he paid for these educational services by sending slaves, copper, and iron to Portugal. Affonso intended to make of Kongo- a Christian nation, equipped fully with Western knowledge and technology and capable of playing a dignified role in the world, as well as in Africa.<sup>45</sup>

One part about this statement is that Affonso felt equal to the Portuguese king. This again goes against popular European rhetoric at the time of Africa consisting of barbaric savages that had not grasped the idea of civilization. Another aspect of what Murphy is saying is that Affonso traded slaves and other goods in exchange for something he valued most, an educated, Christian nation but more importantly one that has a dignified role not only in Africa but in the world. Affonso had a vision, and understood the costs of achieving his goals. He wanted to bring the Kongo not just to a level field with Portugal, but most likely beyond that and be a place like Damascus or Constantinople, which were greatly revered and respected across the world in their time.

However, relations took a turn for the worse against Portugal and the Kingdom of Kongo. With the advent of discovery, such as the Americas in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Europe was itching

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<sup>44</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savannah*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> Murphy, *History of African Civilization*, 193.

for new locales to colonize. Portugal began to view the Kongo as not just a respectable trading partner, but as a resource haven ripe for colonization. As Vansina remarks, “Portugal was willing to help Kongo but wanted to exploit the country economically ... to limit this sovereignty-commercially by keeping monopolies, judicially by sending over special judges for the Portuguese in Kongo.”<sup>46</sup> Thus Portugal wanted to control the Kongo by making monopolies to limit competition, like Andrew Carnegie with steel or John D. Rockefeller with oil, and have favorable judges to get away with such corruption. Vansina notes:

Although Kongo's sovereignty was recognized, Portugal tried, especially after 1520, to prevent the kingdom from having contacts with other European nations. In 1525 a French ship landed at Mpinda but was captured by the local Portuguese ... Two embassies of Affonso to the Vatican were blocked in Lisbon in 1532 and in 1539.<sup>47</sup>

It is apparent that Portugal did not want any other countries in Europe to take their new prized possession. What today would be considered an act of war if such quarantine was invoked, for Portugal it was just an economic scheme to force Affonso to have them as his only trading option. Affonso tried to maintain this relationship for the sake of a better education and way of life for his own kingdom. Tragically for Affonso, his goals were never fully realized as relations abruptly ended as Europe raced into the slave trade.

### Slave Trade

The slave trade began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and soon relations between Portugal and King Affonso broke down. Portugal and Europe now saw Africa as having the world's most valuable commodity, slaves. The ships off the coast arrived in droves and utilized other Africans to bring

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<sup>46</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savannah*, 50.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 53.

slaves from the heartland to those coasts. In a letter to King João III of Portugal in 1526, Affonso implores, “Each day the traders are kidnapping our people- children of this country, sons of our nobles and vassals, even people of our own family... This corruption and depravity are so widespread that our land is entirely depopulated.”<sup>48</sup> He goes on to say later that year, “My Lord, a monstrous greed pushes our subjects, even Christians, to seize members of their own families, and of ours, to do business by selling them as captives.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the slave trade not only turned Portugal and the rest of Europe against Africa but Africans against themselves for European goods. As a converted Christian himself, Affonso could not believe that fellow countries in Europe who shared the same faith could engage in something so monstrous by not only kidnapping and buying Africans off the coast but even enslaving his own family whose sons were ironically bishops of Rome.

The slave trade not only depopulated much of Africa but also dismantled its important chiefdoms and kingdoms that maintained stability and balance throughout the continent. Although this did not stop Affonso from trying to end the slave trade in his own kingdom. Vansina says that, “Affonso set up a board of inspectors [and] before any slave could be bought, the board had to be notified, and if a slave had been kidnapped he would be freed. Traders who did not obey orders would lose their slaves.”<sup>50</sup> It is evident that Affonso tried to do all in his power to curtail the massive and constant kidnappings by setting these regulations.

Yet, it became impossible to regulate when not only traders were the ones kidnapping slaves but everyone else. Murphy states, “Affonso barely held his kingdom together, as priests

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<sup>48</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savannah*, 53.



and merchants conspired with ambitious vassals of his kingdom to enslave and sell Kongolese, as well as neighboring peoples.”<sup>51</sup> The priests that had tutored him as a boy and now his children were now in the frenzy of enslaving any African they could capture for quick money. The Kongo and the other major kingdoms of Africa soon crumbled under the stampede of the slave trade and then the ‘Age of Imperialism.’

### **Decline of Portuguese Influence**

Portugal went on to expand its possessions during the slave trade in Angola and Mozambique. As John H. Clarke, in his article, “The Old Congo,” states, “It was from Angola and the Congo that the Portuguese New World was to derive its greatest source of slaves.”<sup>52</sup> With peaceful relations at an end, the Portuguese desperately tried to attain as much territory as possible to extract more slaves, presumably to send them to Brazil. In 1866, Portugal was able to have major powers like Britain and France recognize their claim in Angola and Mozambique.<sup>53</sup> Although Portuguese influence was still maintained in the Congo, it started to spread to parts of eastern and western Africa.

Yet, with the rediscovery of the Congo by European explorers like Henry Morton Stanley, Portuguese influence in the Congo began to wane. Since Portugal never truly occupied the Congo or held sovereignty, it lacked legitimacy to the other European powers.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Ewans recalls a statement by Lord Clarendon, the British Foreign Secretary, who said in 1853, “the rights which Portugal acquired by priority of discovery at the close of the fifteenth century

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<sup>51</sup> Murphy, *History of African Civilization*, 194.

<sup>52</sup> John H. Clarke, “The Old Congo,” *Phylon*, 23 (1960-), 64.

<sup>53</sup> Charles E. Nowell, “Portugal and the Partition of Africa,” *The Journal of Modern History*, 19 (Mar., 1947), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 79.

have long since suffered to lapse, in consequence of the Portuguese Government having neglected to occupy the countries so discovered.”<sup>55</sup> Thus it seemed that the Portuguese lost any claim to the Congo.

However, this changed when de Brazza, an explorer working for the French, ratified the Makoko Treaty in 1882.<sup>56</sup> This treaty ceded a nine-mile stretch of territory along the northern bank of the Congo River to France.<sup>57</sup> This reignited negotiations with Britain and Portugal and they spoke of a new treaty where Britain would recognize Portugal’s claims to parts of the Congo, mainly the coastal areas.<sup>58</sup> Because of this prospective treaty, international protests ensued and the unverified treaty began to lose popularity in Britain. Some of the most outspoken of the international opposition was from King Leopold II, the king of Belgium. Ewans notes, “To the opposition was added what might be called the Leopold factor’. From the outset, Leopold campaigned vigorously against the Treaty.”<sup>59</sup> Leopold sought out the same area of the Congo and wanted no competitors in his territory. The final aspect that lost Portugal the Congo was the Berlin Conference of 1884. Charles E. Nowell, in his article “Portugal and the Partition of Africa,” remarks about the conference, saying, “Of the general decisions made by the conference, the most important was the new doctrine that possession by nations of territories hitherto considered *res nullius* in international law must be effective to have any validity.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, similar to the early British stance on Portugal’s claims in the Congo, Portugal lost all validity in the Congo since they never had occupied it. With Portugal having lost all claims to the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>60</sup> Charles E. Nowell, *Portugal and the Partition of Africa*, 12.

Congo, there came a new entity that ensured the complete dismantling of any African kingdom or civilization in the majority of Central Africa, and it was not a country but a man, King Leopold II.

### **Consequences: Destruction of Kingdoms and Ethnic Nationalism**

As a result of the slave trade and the Berlin Conference that eventually divided up Africa into European colonies, these chiefdoms and kingdoms were weakened and ultimately disbanded on the arrival of Leopold. The Luba ended up dissolving during the Congo Free State and there are no records of them as a unified kingdom afterwards. The Lunda kingdom's fate was to work under Leopold's Congo Free State. Melvin E. Page, in the book *Colonialism: An International Social Cultural and Political Encyclopedia*, states, "The administrations of King Leopold II's Congo Free State and of the later Belgian colony of Congo urged the Lunda and others to work in the copper and other mines of the southeast."<sup>61</sup> Therefore, once a strong kingdom with an established administration and government, was reduced to forced miners while getting paid nothing. However, Page says, "The Belgians ruled through established Lunda authorities; thus the Lunda preserved their historical traditions and hierarchy."<sup>62</sup> Yet, their land and possessions were confiscated and though fragments of the kingdom would survive they would never again be as organized or rule as before.

The Kingdom of Kongo slowly dissolved after King Affonso I's reign. Noam Schrag, in a book review of Anne Hilton's *The Kingdom of Kongo*, states, "Kongo fragmented into small states and chieftaincies. Central Kongo was characterized by war lords and large slave

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<sup>61</sup> Melvin E. Page, *Colonialism: An International Social Cultural and Political Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 356.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

populations, and Mbanza Kongo lapsed into political obscurity.”<sup>63</sup> The *Mbanza Kongo* was the capital or center of the Kingdom of Kongo where the kings lived, and when it was dismantled through the slave trade and the new Belgian presence in the 1880s, the kingdom was destroyed. Schrag further points out that “By the end of the nineteenth century, he was a "mysterious person" who lived in ritual seclusion and Kongo was reduced to an abstract, other-worldly concept.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, just as the roc bird was a myth to the Europeans, the Kingdom of Kongo became a myth to the Africans through the slave trade and Belgian colonization.

The Berlin Conference further set out on the blind disregard of ethnic ties that Leopold and Belgium would only worsen. As the British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury once said of the Berlin Conference, “We have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where the mountains and rivers and lakes were.”<sup>65</sup> This demonstrates that the European colonies and Leopold had concerns just with geography or territory and not with ethnicities. This would be of consequence when Belgium finally had granted Congo its independence in 1960 and there was no national party to easily take over power.

Independence was as sudden as Belgium’s takeover over of the Congo from Leopold. Since Leopold’s Congo Free State dismantled the major kingdoms, there was no major group or nationalist party to self-govern the Congo. As William Bascom, in his article “Tribalism, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism”, states, “Independence came six months after the first local elections, six weeks after the first general elections, and six days after the first elected

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<sup>63</sup> Norm Schrag, “The Kingdom of Kongo by Anne Hilton,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20 (1987), 147.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa 1880-1914*, (Westport, CONN: Praeger, 1996), 128.

government took office.”<sup>66</sup> This demonstrates the lack of interest in the Congolese ability to self-rule that links back to Leopold. The Congo was used for raw material extraction, and once revolts erupted it became unprofitable and hazardous, hence Belgium rushed into leaving with at least some progress made to try and save face. This is similar to the 1973 Treaty that allowed the United States to leave Vietnam with some hope of South Vietnam remaining independent. However, two years later, South Vietnam was overrun and Vietnam was unified. The Congo suffered a different fate in that there was no nationalist party to unify the Congo in the time allotted by Belgium.

The principal reason for this lack of a unifying party is that because of Leopold’s and Belgium’s supremacy political parties were ethnic or ethnic nationalists. As Bascom remarks, “the competing political parties were largely based on these loyalties and tribalism became a major factor in national politics.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the Congo was reduced to hundreds of ethnic groups vying for power whereas before colonization it had kingdoms that were able to maintain stability in their territories. The Congo was left inept to rule in all aspects whether through the lack of political leadership, education, military, and so forth. The Congolese military consisted of 1,000 Belgian officers and zero Congolese officers.<sup>68</sup> According to Claude Kabemba, in his book *Whither the DRC?: Causes of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Way Forward*, “For five years after independence Congo was without a single political authority,

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<sup>66</sup> William R. Bascom, “Tribalism, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 342 (Jul., 1962), 24.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ebere Nwaubani, “Eisenhower, Nkrumah and the Congo Crisis,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36 (Oct., 2001), 607.

barely existing in a pre-civil condition until Mobutu Sese Seko assumed power in 1965.”<sup>69</sup> Thus with each political party being ethnically driven rather than nationally, it made it susceptible for a dictator like Mobutu to rise to power and rule the Congo, or as he renamed it Zaire, from 1965 to 1997. Although it is with different ethnic groups, ethnic conflict and wars continue to plague the Congo today.

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<sup>69</sup> Claude Kabemba, *Whither the DRC?: Causes of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Way Forward*, Centre for Policy Studies, [www.cps.org.za/drc.htm](http://www.cps.org.za/drc.htm).

## KING LEOPOLD'S ACQUISITION OF THE CONGO

Leopold had acquired the Congo not from being publically elected by a representative democracy but through deception and manipulation. At a time when the slave trade was being criticized he needed to use other means to attain an African colony. He first sought explorers to map out areas in Central Africa and sign treaties with local chiefs. Once those were attained, he would show those treaties to any statesmen to further legitimize his position and control over the gained territories. However, treaties were not enough and Leopold created humanitarian organizations to help “civilize” the Congo when really they were created to fund his exploration of the Congo and garner him recognition from major countries. With people like Stanley and Henry Shelton Sanford, Leopold got the recognition he needed and through the Geographical and Berlin Conferences he finally had his colony.

### Henry Morton Stanley

One of those people Leopold used to acquire the Congo was Henry Morton Stanley. Stanley was an explorer who wanted fame and jumped at any chance to reach notoriety among his peers. Adam Hochschild, in *King Leopold's Ghost*, mentions that Stanley purposefully made up stories of his youth to sound prominent and heroic. For instance, according to Hochschild, in Stanley's autobiography, he told a story of when he was fifteen and led a class rebellion against a vicious and abusive professor named Francis. However, Hochschild observes, “Other students later recalled no mutiny, much less one led by Stanley; they remembered Francis as a gentle man and Stanley as a teacher's pet.”<sup>70</sup> This tells quite a bit about Stanley's own character, which

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<sup>70</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 24.

would be of good use to Leopold. Leopold needed someone who wanted fame and would lead an expeditionary force and map out the Congo, wipe out resisters, and declare borders so that Leopold could claim such a large territory.

The expeditionary force Stanley led into the Congo first wanted to map out the geography and terrain hoping to find rivers and other large bodies of water for navigation to make colonization easier. Didier Gondola, in *The History of Congo*, recalls one of Stanley's expeditions to the Congo in November 1874, eleven years before Leopold created the Congo Free State. Stanley's force consisted of Europeans armed with rifles and Zanzibar porters to carry the supplies. Gondola states, "The journey included 7,000 miles of perilous walking and rowing. Stanley sometimes forced his Zanzibari porters to transport the steamboats overland."<sup>71</sup> The trip included hundreds of casualties due to the long treks over arduous terrain. To add to this, Stanley recalled part of this expedition and said, "When mud and wet sapped the physical energy of the lazily inclined ... a dog-whip became their backs, restoring them to a sound—sometimes extravagant—activity."<sup>72</sup> Thus one can assume that this was not an expedition to make relations or friends with any African chiefs or kingdoms but solely to map out a large chunk of Central Africa.

The territory that Stanley mapped out for Leopold was massive beyond scale and bigger than most modern countries of today. Hochschild states, "If superimposed on the map of Europe, [the Congo] would stretch from Zürich to Moscow to central Turkey. It was as large as the entire United States east of the Mississippi."<sup>73</sup> One of Stanley's main missions was to navigate the

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<sup>71</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 49.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 72.



famous Congo River and to see if it could reach the Atlantic. Once he arrived at Boma, near the Atlantic Ocean, he realized that the Congo River does in fact reach the Atlantic making it more assessable to carry supplies and extra armed guards to the Congo for Leopold.

### Treaties

The most important part of Stanley's expedition was to attain treaties during the early 1880s from African chiefs from the Upper Congo to Boma.<sup>74</sup> Gondola states, "He had under his belt a sheaf of some 400 treaties extorted from local chiefs. These treaties paved the way for military penetration of the Congo Basin and also ignited the 'Scramble for Africa'."<sup>75</sup> However, since it was not written in their native language, the African chiefs had no idea of what they were signing. Hochschild quotes Leopold saying, "The treaties must be as brief as possible ... and in a couple of articles must grant us everything."<sup>76</sup> Cutting right to the point, Leopold was telling Stanley that he wanted the Congo as a colony with no exceptions. This is reminiscent of the 'El Requerimiento', or the Spanish Requirement of 1513 that the Spaniards read in Spanish to the Native Americans saying they had the right to take the Native Americans property and possessions and that any resistance would be met with annihilation. Of course the Native Americans could not understand since the language was foreign, and many because of this were exploited and slaughtered. Unfortunately many Congolese suffered the same fate.

Another aspect of this is that the chiefs had no idea who these men were and what would come their way after signing the treaties. Not only did they sign their property and land away,

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<sup>74</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 54.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 71.

but their labor as well. Gondola notes, “they tolerated him within their dominion and even went as far as to grant him parcels of land to set up stations. They hoped that in response to such concessions the presence of the white man on their land would boost trade.”<sup>77</sup> These stations were used as bases to help establish the early colony. As more Belgian officials could live there the more they could spread and extract resources. Hochschild includes one quote in his book detailing some of the circumstances of what these treaties said. Hochschild mentions one treaty signed on April 1, 1884 that read:

In return for "one piece of cloth per month to each of the undersigned chiefs, besides present of cloth in hand," they promised to "freely of their own accord, for themselves and their heirs and successors for ever ... give up to the said Association the sovereignty and all sovereign and governing rights to all their territories ... and to assist by labour or otherwise, any works, improvements or expeditions which the said Association shall cause at any time to be carried out in any part of these territories.... All roads and waterways running through this country, the right of collecting tolls on the same, and all game, fishing, mining and forest rights, are to be the absolute property of the said Association."<sup>78</sup>

Consequently the chiefs sold off everything for just some pieces of cloth. They gave up their sovereignty, civil rights and liberties. Besides giving up land and labor, they gave up access to important roads, pathways, or waterways that are all essential to survival. They also gave up all means of property, whether it was food, minerals, or lumber. Without any of these items, not even a modern civilization would last.

## **Geographical Conference**

King Leopold’s Geographical Conference began in September 1876, and it was held in Brussels, Belgium. This was obviously another piece of propaganda as he wanted the world

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<sup>77</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 54.

<sup>78</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 72.

to believe that Brussels would be the home for establishing explorations and expeditions in the Congo for purely altruistic and civilizing reasons. Leopold said in his welcoming speech to the Conference, “To open to civilization the only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness which hangs over entire peoples, is I dare say, a crusade worthy of this century of progress.”<sup>79</sup> This encompasses Leopold’s wish into having everyone at the Conference believe in his alleged sole desire to “civilize” the Congo. In addition, by saying crusade, Leopold is somewhat comparing this expedition to that of a holy mission that must be done for the common good of humanity. They could now feel some sense of purpose, involvement, and dedication to funding and exploring the Congo.

Leopold went so far as to use his own office, the Royal Palace, as the headquarters of the Conference due to the lack of many buildings of such stature. The staff members that lived at the Royal Palace were forced to sleep in closets as their rooms were converted to guest bedrooms and Leopold also had seven thousand candles on display in his throne room.<sup>80</sup> He wanted to show not so much Belgium but himself as a rich, eloquent, and caring leader that can lead the exploration into Africa and used any type of visual symbols to achieve these aims. For instance, Ewans notes, “a flag was adopted, a gold star on a blue background, apparently symbolizing the bringing of light to the African darkness.”<sup>81</sup> This was just another fabrication Leopold used to have the other countries believe in his and Europe’s noble purpose in the Congo and Africa. Leopold further elaborates on what his goals were with this Geographical Conference, saying, “It is not a question of a business proposition, it is a matter

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 45.

of a completely spontaneous collaboration between all those who wish to engage in introducing civilization to Africa.”<sup>82</sup> The part where he said that it is not a business proposition was to repeat the idea that he was not interested in any economic venture but solely to “civilize” Africa. As someone who has mastered the art of manipulation and propaganda, Leopold’s guests were swept away by the hospitality he provided them and of a new sense of mission to explore and civilize Africa for its own benefit.

### Guests

The Guests at the Geographical Conference were an assortment of the world’s leading explorers, princes, wealthy industrialist, and statesmen. Leopold wanted to make sure that this Conference was legitimate, and the way to attain this legitimacy was to have some of the world’s most respected and celebrated people in attendance, hence providing for further credibility. Hochschild provides a list of some of the most notable attendees:

Among the thirteen Belgians and twenty-four foreign guests were famous explorers, like France's Marquis de Compiegne, who had gone up the Ogowé River in Gabon, and Germany's Gerhard Rohlfs, who had had himself circumcised so that he could pass for a Muslim while trekking to remote parts of the Sahara; geographers, like Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, the president of the Berlin Geographical Society; humanitarians, like Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, president of Britain's Anti-Slavery Society, and Sir John Kennaway, president of the Church Missionary Society; business executives, like William Mackinnon of the British India Line; and military men, like Rear Admiral Sir Leopold Heath of England, who had headed the Royal Navy's Indian Ocean antislavery patrol, and Vice Admiral Baron de la Roncière-le-Noury, president of the Paris Geographical Society.<sup>83</sup>

A common occurrence with most of these men is that they consist of humanitarians and antislavery activists. Some are missionaries wanting to spread their religion in hopes of

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>83</sup>Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 43 and 44.

“saving” Africa and others like the businessmen wanted to fund exploration and antislavery efforts.

Leopold desperately needed the approval of these types of influential people so that their respective countries could buy into his false goals of civilizing and ending the slave trade in Africa. Moreover, he made sure not to invite anyone with competing interests in the Congo, like that of Portugal. Charles E. Nowell states, “though presumably the congress was an affair of private individuals, it still looked like a studied effort to exclude the nation whose African interests were the oldest and in many ways still the largest.”<sup>84</sup> As previously mentioned, this would further remove Portugal’s claims to the Congo. Leopold would even use some of these explorers to his own advantage. Pyotr Semenov was an acclaimed Russian geographer who became the Chair of the Conference because Leopold was well aware that Semenov knew nothing about Africa. Hochschild explains the reasoning behind this, saying, “He was easily able to maneuver Semenov so that the chain of bases endorsed by the conference would stretch across the unclaimed territory of the Congo River basin that interested Leopold most.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, Leopold could now use these geographers at the Conference to help map out and establish bases in his desired part of Africa, the Congo.

### Stations

Through the Geographical Conference, Leopold urged the guests to start establishing bases, which would only add to his claim of the Congo. On the different locales for the bases,

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<sup>84</sup>Charles E. Nowell, “Portugal and the Partition of Africa,” 8.

<sup>85</sup>Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 45.

Leopold said, “The locations of operational bases should be established, among other places, on the coast of Zanzibar and the Congo estuary; routes and stations should be designated in the interior, as a means of abolishing slavery and ‘establishing concord among the chiefs’.”<sup>86</sup> Zanzibar, the archipelago to the east of the Congo, made a great post for Leopold since it was accessible to ships and those ships could reach the Congo estuary through the Congo River. Again Leopold mentions ending slavery but also establishing talks with chiefs although he had already had Stanley manipulate them into signing their livelihoods away.

Leopold would further use the Geographical Conference’s money to fund Stanley’s expeditions to develop bases. One example is Emin Pasha, a German working for the Ottoman Empire, who came to be the governor of Equatoria in modern day Sudan. Hochschild remarks, “Once Stanley found Emin Pasha, he would ask him to remain the governor of his province—but as a province of the Congo state.”<sup>87</sup> Although Stanley was initially sent to rescue him as his government was close to being toppled, under the direction of Leopold he told Emin to stay put and work for the development of Leopold’s Congo. Another one of these expeditions from Zanzibar set up a few stations in the Congo but were early failures. Ewans notes, “One of them succeeded in setting up a station at Karema, on Lake Tanganyika, but in general they achieved very little and cost many lives. Another of them ... made a disastrous attempt to introduce Indian elephants for transport purposes.”<sup>88</sup> This highlights Leopold’s determination to set up stations to exploit the Congo at all costs.

Although Leopold had a few setbacks at first, he was determined to control East Africa to

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<sup>86</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 41.

<sup>87</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 97.

<sup>88</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 41.

make his way into the Congo and lay claim to the region. Ewans also writes on Leopold's mindset, saying, "He also seems to have wished to keep East Africa in reserve as a route to the Congo basin, until he could be confident that access would be possible through the Congo estuary."<sup>89</sup> Plotting and scheming different ways to access and control the Congo was always on Leopold's mind. He was careful on not to impede on any other European's claims to territories in Africa and sought to get to the Congo since everyone else wanted coastal territories. The support gained from the Geographical Conference was tremendous but Leopold's one problem was that he still had yet to attain worldwide recognition for the Congo since expeditions and stations were not enough for pure ownership.

#### International African Association

Near the end of the Geographical Conference, the guests decided to vote to make an international organization that would fulfill their goals of allegedly civilizing and ending the Arab slave trade in Africa. Thus they established the International African Association (AIA). The AIA had an Executive Committee in Brussels that carried out its provisions and managed its finances.<sup>90</sup> Ewans explains the structure, "The members of this Executive Committee would be the President of the Commission and three other members ... It would also have a Secretary-General and a Treasurer."<sup>91</sup> Of course, as Leopold had planned, the guests voted Leopold as the President of the AIA, and after his almost guaranteed election he said every year the presidency

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

will rotate between countries. However, the year after that and the years following it was still Leopold at the helm of the organization.

To establish full control of the organization, Leopold gave friends positions on the committee so he could use them for his own motives. Ewans notes that, “An able Belgian diplomat, Jules Greindl, who had assisted Leopold in his efforts to buy the Philippines from Spain, was appointed Secretary-General.”<sup>92</sup> This shows that Leopold wanted this organization for only one reason, to help attain a colony in Africa. He was not able to buy the Philippines or any other colony in the world so he decided to take one by force through these philanthropic smokescreens. Furthermore, Leopold appointed the Count of Flanders, his own brother, as the President of the National Committee.<sup>93</sup> Ewans states the National Committee “would be set up by the participating societies ‘with the object of centralizing, so far as possible, the efforts made by their nationals and of facilitating, by their meetings, the resolutions of the Commission’.”<sup>94</sup> With Leopold at the helm with control of finances, his brother in control of resolutions, and his friend that almost got him his first prized colony with the Philippines elected Secretary-General; Leopold literally had all of his fingers in the pot.

The International African Association slowly faded from anything international and was more like a dictatorship, unbeknown to its members. Ewans reports that, “For a while, the Executive Committee of the AIA issued bulletins reporting the activities of its East African expeditions, but in 1880 even this activity ceased.”<sup>95</sup> Leopold cared about getting the support and funds to venture into the Congo and establish stations, but once he established a foothold he

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<sup>92</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 46.



did not want anyone knowing what was really going on there. Ewans also states, “In 1883, one of the Swiss delegates to the International Commission protested publicly about the continuing silence and the fact that the Commission had not been convened for several years.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore it is evident that this was just a front organization, and only until it was too late did other delegates and statesmen start to notice.

The AIA did have one critic, the British, who might have felt either resentful that Brussels was the headquarters and not London of the AIA, or that it truly saw the ineffectiveness of the private organization. Ewans writes about one British official, Henry Thring, and his criticism of the AIA:

The suppression of the slave trade was, he insisted, properly a matter for governments only and not within the province of any private organisation; the establishment of stations would of necessity involve ‘grave commercial questions and interference in disputes incidental to all trading transactions in uncivilised countries’; and an international association ‘of which the majority would necessarily be foreigners’ might be ‘disposed to favour views which would be disapproved of by the [British] delegates.’<sup>97</sup>

Thring mentions two important details that other officials forgot. One is that these stations would infringe on the local trade of the communities and secondly that the views of the organization might not represent other countries or members. The British opted for their own organization, the African Exploration Fund, leaving Leopold without any contenders to counter him on decisions within the organization.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 44.

## Henry Shelton Sanford

Almost as much as an influence to Leopold as Stanley, Henry Shelton Sanford helped secure Leopold's recognition for his new found Congo. Sanford was the American minister to Belgium and a businessman who founded the city of Sanford, Florida, about ten miles from where I grew up. Yet, Leopold saw this as an opportunity and paid Sanford to go back and lobby Washington and President Chester Arthur for recognition of his Congo. As Hochschild notes, they even created a secret lingo for negotiations between each other, "Achille referred to Stanley, Eugénie to France, Alice to the United States, Joseph to "sovereign rights," and Émile to the key target, the president."<sup>99</sup> This is not a sign of openness or transparency that is highly regarded in diplomacy, but of manipulation and deception used to see how Sanford's progress was with getting the United States to recognize the Congo. Another instance of this deception came in the form of an edited letter that Leopold told Sanford to read to American officials. It read, "Entire territories ceded by Sovereign Chiefs have been constituted by us into independent States."<sup>100</sup> Stanley obviously, as mentioned earlier, took by deception these territories and had chiefs sign these territories away without their knowing. Although Sanford's businesses in Florida ended up failing, his ability to alter the present situation in the Congo knew no bounds.

Sanford also told American delegates and Congress that the Congo would be spearheaded under the International African Association (AIA). The world had thought this was a philanthropic organization meant to bring civilization and to drive the Arab slavers out of Africa. Yet, this just proved to be a smokescreen like the other Leopoldian philanthropic organizations. Ewans, in *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, recalls the President's mistaken beliefs of the

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<sup>99</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 77.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

AIA, saying, “It had, said the President, purely philanthropic goals; it offered freedom of commerce and the suppression of the slave trade; and it was seeking the neutrality of the Congo basin, over which it had no desire to establish permanent political control.”<sup>101</sup> What is important is that the President was told that it would be open up for free trade.

The President thought that the United States could trade freely within the Congo and there would be no permanent government controlling or regulating the flow of trade. Another senator was fooled by this, saying Leopold’s Congo ““has developed to extraordinary proportions and has had for practical result the opening up to civilizing influence and to the world’s traffic of this vast, populous and fertile region, and securing certain destruction to the slave trade wherever its flag floats.””<sup>102</sup> Therefore, it was evident to most American officials that Leopold was abolishing the slave trade and providing a new market for the United States to invest. What the United States and the President failed to realize was that Leopold never had any intentions of having a philanthropic organization ruling the Congo, and that it would only be under his own private rule.

Another way Sanford was able to attain the U.S. recognition of the Congo was to equate Leopold’s Congo with America’s own territory in Africa, that of Liberia. On November 29, 1883, Sanford told President Arthur, “Leopold's great work of civilization ... was much like the generous work the United States itself had done in Liberia, where, starting in 1820, freed American slaves had moved to what soon became an independent African country.”<sup>103</sup> Leopold wanted the United States to believe that he shared their similar interests with ending the slave

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<sup>101</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 84 and 86.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>103</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 77.

trade and slavery in general. The U.S. had created Liberia largely due to some in Congress who wanted to deport ex-slaves since they were no longer of any use to them being free. Another factor was that unlike Liberia, which became an independent state, Leopold wanted full control of the Congo. Therefore, he had to have Sanford distort his ambitions. According to Ewans, on how using Liberia worked best for Sanford, says:

The supposed parallel with Liberia, moreover, not only appeared to dispose neatly of the contention that a private association could not exercise sovereign rights, but the firm impression was given that, having established a group of 'Free States' in the Congo, the AIA would, like the ACS, withdraw as soon as the 'Free States' were able to govern themselves.<sup>104</sup>

This is significant because Sanford kept playing off the word free, whether through free trade or 'Free States' to make it seem that Leopold was using the Congo for the greater good. Sanford mentions again the Leopoldian philanthropic smokescreen, the International African Association, and compares it to the U.S. American Colonization Society (ACS) that founded Liberia. He wanted to make sure the President and Washington officials believed that the AIA (really Leopold) would pull out once the States could govern themselves, and once again they failed to realize Leopold's true intent.

Now that Sanford was able to sway the President and Congress on what alleged good deeds Leopold would bring to the Congo, he wanted to also sway the people. Hochschild notes, "Favorable accounts of the king's philanthropic work began appearing in major American newspapers, stimulated, in the fashion of the day, by quiet payments from Sanford."<sup>105</sup> With the press paid off, the American people were getting fed these lies about Leopold and his goals for free trade and an end to slavery in the Congo. With mostly everyone in full support, on April 22,

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<sup>104</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 85 and 86.

<sup>105</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 80.

1884, the United States became the first country to officially recognize King Leopold II's Congo. The United States still had no idea that the differences between Leopold's organizations, with the now defunct International African Association initially started by explorers and princes, and the International Association of the Congo, which was Leopold's economic organization meant to exploit the Congo.

However, Leopold did not want the Americans to know that the International African Association would not be running the Congo, but that his International Association of the Congo would be solely in charge. The confusion is present when the U.S. secretary uses both of the organizations as separate entities in part of his speech, saying, "The United States announces its sympathy with ... the International Association of the Congo, administering ... the interests of the Free States there established, and will ... recognize the flag of the International African Association as the flag of a friendly Government."<sup>106</sup> Confusion was Leopold's best chance to secure the Congo, and Sanford did an excellent job on consistently interchanging the acronyms with Washington officials so they thought both served the same purposes. With the United States recognition, it made it that much easier for Leopold to attain recognition from other major powers competing for territory in Africa.

### **Berlin Conference**

The Berlin Conference of 1884 was the final key to unlocking the Congo for Leopold. The Conference was initiated by one of the leading diplomats of the time, Otto von Bismarck. He was the man responsible for finally uniting the loosely banded states into the German Confederation and ultimately Germany. With the formation of the German Confederation, and

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 81.

after his victory of the Franco-Prussian War, Bismarck saw opportunity as with the rest of Europe, in the commercialization of Africa to open up brand new markets.<sup>107</sup> In the book *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts*, the authors say that Bismarck “convened a conference of 14 states ... to settle the political partitioning of Africa. Bismarck wanted ... also to play off Germany's colonial rivals against one another to the Germans' advantage.”<sup>108</sup> Leopold could not have asked for a better turnout of events. Leopold would later exploit Bismarck's and other European leader's fears of each other and play the innocent neutral that was satisfied with just the Congo and of course free trade.

The map of Africa was literally drawn together as how the major countries would split territory. The authors of *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts* add, “These lines were drawn through known as well as unknown areas, pieces of territory were haggled over, boundaries were erased and redrawn, and African real estate was exchanged among European governments.”<sup>109</sup> Most of these statesmen had never or would never set foot in Africa, as in the case with Leopold, but were fine with carving it up like a pie so they could all get their piece. Of course the whole notions of civilizing and ending the slave trade were still there, but it was transparent that these countries wanted indirect rule to attain as much resources as possible. They took in no concerns of how this would later affect hostile African chiefdoms and kingdoms who might have been rivals, who were now jumbled together in European made up territories. If it was a true civilizing mission to help end the slave trade, then there would have been at least one African invited to the Berlin Conference because who better to speak on what Africans need than

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<sup>107</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 56.

<sup>108</sup> Harm J. Blij and Peter O. Muller, *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1994), 294.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves? Yet, there were none.<sup>110</sup> Hochschild states, “Stanley had ignited the great African land rush, but even he felt uneasy about the greed in the air. It reminded him ... of how "my black followers used to rush with gleaming knives for slaughtered game during our travels."<sup>111</sup> That imagery would certainly describe the eager personalities at the Conference wanting to claim as much territory for their respective countries as available.

### Colonial Chess Game

Luckily for Leopold, most of the European countries considered each other rivals and forgot about little Belgium. Martin Ewans, in *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, writes of how each country wanted to slight the others, saying:

Bismarck saw it as a means of securing Germany's commercial objectives and of resolving what seemed to him to be an increasingly worrying source of international friction. He was also concerned to isolate the British, whom he suspected-wrongly- of aiming to take over the lion's share of the continent. The French for their part were pleased at the prospect of a joint venture with Germany, and also saw the conference as a means of thwarting the British, towards whom they still bore resentment over Egypt.<sup>112</sup>

Bismarck was a believer in *realpolitik* and spheres of influence, and saw the British as an early threat since they had already colonized almost a third of the world. Yet, it was Britain and Germany who came together on the idea of free trade whereas France and Portugal wanted pure isolationist territories for exploitation.<sup>113</sup> With all of these major powers arguing back and forth over spheres of influence, Leopold was able to use their own fears of each other in his favor.

Leopold was quick to act when he saw that some countries wanted parts of the Congo that he had worked so skillfully and deceptively to survey and establish stations. France and

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<sup>110</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 56.

<sup>111</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 95.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Portugal had made an agreement that they would each split some of the lower Congo, to which Leopold became furious. He drafted a letter and had it rapidly sent to Bismarck. Leopold wrote to Bismarck that if such actions occurred, “I am irrevocably decided to dismiss all my personnel in Africa, after instructing them to destroy all material and to withdraw completely’.”<sup>114</sup> This is basically political blackmail. Bismarck, nor any other major power, wanted to see each other develop bigger territories than everyone else.

Having Leopold in the heart of Africa created a good buffer zone, reducing the amount of tensions that may cross between colonies if they shared common borders. Bismarck also feared the right of preference Leopold gave to France in regards to his own territory. Thus, not wanting Leopold packing his bags and France gaining all of that territory, he talked with Portugal and France and threatened action unless they dropped their agreement over the lower Congo.<sup>115</sup> Leopold further ensured the support of Portugal by using the same threat he gave Bismarck. Gann and Duignan note, “If the AIC should unexpectedly be forced to “realize” its possessions, that is to dispose of them, then France would have a droit de preference over them.”<sup>116</sup> With France and Portugal in check, and Bismarck on his side, Leopold was able to add territories like Katanga, Vivi, Boma, and Banana Point, adding more coastlines for better sea access.<sup>117</sup>

### General Act

The Berlin Conference concluded with a General Act that set the provisions and rules that the member countries would follow. Marjorie Florestal, in her article, “On the Origin of Fear in

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>116</sup>Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 104.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 100.



the World Trade System: Excavating the Roots of the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885,” mentions the long list of details that made up the Act. She states, “Imports were to be free of all duties and transit charges, and no prohibitive fees were to be maintained. And the granting of a monopoly "or favour of any kind" in matters of trade in the region was strictly prohibited.”<sup>118</sup> This is significant because it shows just how much free trade was emphasized and not solely the partition of Africa that would later come to embody the Conference. Leopold would later go on to disregard these ordinances once in full control of the Congo. Didier Gondola, in his book *The History of Congo*, adds to the rules created at the Conference by saying, “1) freedom of trade in the basin and estuary of the Congo, 2) freedom of navigation on the Congo and Niger, and 3) formalities to be observed in relation to occupation of new territories on the African coast.”<sup>119</sup> These countries, especially Britain and Germany, wanted to be able to move around freely and navigate the major waterways to carry more supplies through. Leopold could hardly complain now that he had the protection of the General Act to bring ships and survey even more territory in the Congo.

Another important part about the General Act was that it allowed for countries to claim neutrality. These countries would pose no physical threat to the surrounding countries and vice versa. Leopold jumped at this opportunity and immediately claimed neutrality in the Congo, since in doing so his organization, the International Association of the Congo (AIC) would be recognized as the sovereign power in the Congo. Jesse S. Reeves, in his article “The Origin of the Congo Free State, Considered from the Standpoint of International Law,” remarks on this

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<sup>118</sup> Marjorie Florestal, “On the Origin of Fear in the World Trade System: Excavating the Roots of the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885,” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting*, 101 (March 28-31, 2007), 145.

<sup>119</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 56.

momentous occasion for Leopold by saying, “The recognition of the association was complete and unconditional. It was not half sovereign or dependent, but fully sovereign.”<sup>120</sup> Therefore, Leopold’s organization for the exploitation of the Congo was now sovereign, and as the leader, he personally, and not Belgium, attained sovereignty.

### Congo Free State

With sovereignty over the Congo, Leopold decided to give it an appealing name that other major powers like the United States, Britain, and Germany might admire. The Congo Free State implies that it is a free state, since the insistence of free trade was most important to those countries. In order to gain rightful sovereignty over the Congo Free State, he had to appeal to Belgium. Leopold simply said, “King of the Belgians, I shall be at the same time sovereign of another State. This State will be independent, like Belgium; and, like her, it will enjoy the benefits of neutrality.”<sup>121</sup> Belgium consented and Leopold became sovereign of two nations, one through being of royalty, the other through being manipulative using philanthropic smokescreens. Moreover, Reeves adds, “Leopold was not a "constitutional" sovereign, in the sense that his powers were limited by any fundamental law of the State.”<sup>122</sup> As a result, Leopold became the sole ruler of the Congo, and his actions would be unrestrained by a parliament or government.

However, one country was much bigger than the other. Ewans discusses the vast land mass of the new Congo Free State, taking up much of Central Africa, by stating, “A colony in

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<sup>120</sup> Jesse S. Reeves, “The Origin of the Congo Free State, Considered from the Standpoint of International Law,” *The American Journal of International Law*, 3 (Jan., 1909), 115.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

the heart of Africa some 900,000 square miles, about eighty times as large as Belgium and some one twelfth of the total land mass of the continent.”<sup>123</sup> This is more than Leopold could have ever dreamed of in his previous goals. Although he was distraught over not being able to colonize the Philippines, that pales in comparison to a resource rich region that is about the same size as Western Europe. With the Congo Free State, Leopold could now send in men and equipment to truly colonize it and exploit everything and everyone within the territory.

### **Consequences: Belgian Annexation**

King Leopold II’s new sovereignty over the Congo Free State had lasting consequences for the Congo after his rule. By taking political control, no African chiefs or kings had any more authority and their chances at self-autonomy were gone. When Leopold was forced to abandon the Congo in 1908 due to charges of crimes against humanity, he as a private owner sold the Congo to his country of Belgium. The Belgian rule lasted more than twice as long than the Congo Free State, ranging from 1908 to 1960. Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan, in *Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914*, mention that Belgium took off right where Leopold left and continued the same colonization methods. They state, “The Belgian government, for its part, received a large amount of real and personal property belonging to the Free State, together with stock in various Congo companies that had previously been owned by the state.”<sup>124</sup> Thus they maintained the same possessions and control over the concession companies. The multinational

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<sup>123</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 101.

<sup>124</sup> Gann and Duignan, *Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 151.

corporations like the mining company Comité spécial du Katanga (CSK) also controlled the same land concessions they had under the Congo Free State.<sup>125</sup>

They further maintained the same personnel from the Congo Free State. Hochschild notes, “The same men who had been district commissioners and station chiefs for Leopold would now simply get their paychecks from a different source.”<sup>126</sup> Therefore this shows Belgium’s true intentions with gaining control of the Congo which was to uphold the exploitation of its resources by any means necessary. The Force Publique did not change its name and a former official of one concession company that used thousands of forced laborers to build railways was elected as the Belgian minister of colonies.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, as Hochschild elaborates, “The head of the Belgian Senate committee that approved the new colonial budget—which *increased* "taxes in kind" on Africans ... was a shareholder in the notorious rubber concession company, A.B.I.R.”<sup>128</sup> Through continued relations with the concession companies, Belgium set up decades of rule through coercion and exploitation which is something they said would be stopped when they took over the Congo. Belgium simply carried on Leopold’s legacy.

Economically, Belgium also amassed substantial revenue from their new control over Leopold’s companies. They gained around 61 million francs from personal property and stock that Leopold once had and 110,337,000 francs which was considered the value of the Congo.<sup>129</sup> This would be billions of dollars in today’s standards. Gann and Duignan remark on the vast production of the Congo versus Belgium, “In 1912 the value of Belgium’s imports was 4.958

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 271.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Gann and Duignan, *Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 201.

million francs, and its exports were worth 3.951 million. Congolese exports in 1912 were reckoned at no more than 83,465,000 francs, imports at some 61,864,000 francs.”<sup>130</sup> This is important because it shows how much Belgium relied on the production in the Congo for its income.

This also demonstrates the vast difference in the import and export ratios, with Belgium importing more than exporting and the Congo substantially exporting more than importing. The trade imbalance validates that the Congo was being purely exploited with no resources for public infrastructure, education, healthcare, or anything else being provided for by the Belgian government. Belgium saw quick profits in the Congo, and along with the concession companies, sought to repress any means of change or democratization within the Congo. According to Gann and Duignan, “Three-fourths of all economic activity was said to be controlled by five large companies, all but one Belgian-owned.”<sup>131</sup> With no economic activity controlled by the Congolese, they were in no shape to fund social or developmental projects for their own wellbeing and hence remained forced laborers under Belgian rule.

### World War I

The colonization of the Congo by Belgium also meant that the Congo had to suffer for Belgium’s crises and perils back in Europe. One of the major crises was World War I in which Belgium forced the Congo to step up production for war resources. As Gann and Duignan note “In 1917 the government passed an ordinance that provided for the compulsory cultivation of

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 202.

cotton and of food crops such as manioc, sweet potatoes, rice, and corn.”<sup>132</sup> Thus not only did the Congo have to provide Belgium with rubber and minerals for economic profit, but now food to have to feed their officials and soldiers. The cultivators were not paid world market prices but small fixed prices for their labor.<sup>133</sup> Besides feeding the war effort, the Congo also was forced to provide soldiers to fight in the war. The Force Publique invaded Tanzania in East Africa under German control.<sup>134</sup> Yet, the soldiers on the front lines were Congolese. Hochschild describes the Congolese manpower in the war effort:

In 1916, by colonial officials' count, one area in the eastern Congo, with a population of 83,518 adult men, supplied more than three million man-days of portage during the year; 1359 of these porters were worked to death or died of disease. Famines raged. A Catholic missionary reported, "The father of the family is at the front, the mother is grinding flour for the soldiers, and the children are carrying the foodstuffs!"<sup>135</sup>

This statement reveals the amount of labor and casualties inflicted on the Congolese by Belgium. They forced everyone in this particular area to fight in the war, carry supplies, and provide the food. In actuality, it is no stretch to say that it was the Congo that was fighting Belgium's war.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 278.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

## KING LEOPOLD'S EXPLOITATION OF THE CONGO

Once Leopold colonized the Congo Free State, he sought to extract resources as cheaply as possible. Some of the notable resources were ivory and rubber, both of which had high demand around the world. In order to extract these resources, Leopold set up a military organization and allowed concession companies to spread out along the Congo Free State to set up extraction camps. Leopold and these companies would use forced labor to acquire these resources and thus gain immeasurable profits. As a result of 23 years of Leopoldian rule, half of the population in the Congo died, thus being one of the worst tragedies of modern times. After Leopold's reign, the Congo would be entrenched with debt that still is growing beyond repayment. Thus it is important to note how Leopold exploited the Congo to show how he set the stage for the Congo's economic crisis following his rule.

### Ivory

After King Leopold II became sovereign of the Congo Free State, his first way of exploiting the Congo was through the collection and sale of ivory. Ivory was one of the most demanded materials at the time, similar to diamonds today. In fact, the Congo was supplying around 85 percent of the world's ivory by 1870.<sup>136</sup> The wealthy in Europe sought ivory for decorative purposes but it could also be used for essential household items. Ivory was used for piano keys, cutlery handles, billiard balls, false teeth, and there was a growing market for ivory bangles and elephant teeth in India.<sup>137</sup> Ivory was so plentiful that it was even made into

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<sup>136</sup> Gann and Duigan, *Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 117.

<sup>137</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 157.

crucifixes, snuff boxes, door posts, combs, chess pieces, door handles and door knobs.<sup>138</sup> Ivory was becoming so popular that Leopold immediately took preventative measures to safeguard his new treasure, so to speak. Ewans writes, “In March 1890 the Free State quadrupled the export duties on ivory, a move which Leopold tried to justify to Beernaert by arguing that the state had every right to harvest the product of its own lands.”<sup>139</sup> He made sure that no other organization or private company could make as much profit off of ivory as him; after all, he said that it was the product of his own land, ironically a land he never did step foot in.

Although this meant decimation of African communities whose villages would get ransacked in the search of ivory, it meant extreme profits for Leopold. Gann and Duigan, in their book *Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914*, state, “Between 1889 and 1895 ivory accounted for more than half of the Congo’s exports.”<sup>140</sup> They also state that in 1897, Leopold was making about 5 million francs a year from ivory sales.<sup>141</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, counting for inflation, 5 million dollars today would be over 120 million dollars in 1913.<sup>142</sup> This signifies the amount of extraction that was going on in just one year let alone over a decade that Leopold had been profiting from the ivory trade. Ultimately this would lead to almost extinction numbers for elephants, and as ivory flooded the market in the 1890s its value plummeted.

## **Catholic Schools**

Another measure Leopold took to exploit the Congo was through the sending of Catholics missionaries, who were of course favorable to his cause because he funded them.

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<sup>138</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 64.

<sup>139</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 158.

<sup>140</sup> Gann and Duigan, *Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 118

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> “Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, <http://www.bls.gov/>.



These Catholic missionaries formed schools or colonies to educate the Congolese children on matters beneficial to the State. Johannes Fabian, in his article “Missions and the Colonization of African Languages: Developments in the Former Belgian Congo,” discusses the organization and structure of the schools. One of the rules was, “Teaching the Belgian national languages will be an essential part of the curriculum.”<sup>143</sup> This is noteworthy because why should these schools not teach national languages that are pivotal to everyday life and communication within their society? Ewans answers this by stating, “There was also a strong bias in favour of preparing Africans solely to become members of the workforce required by the mining, agricultural and other companies.”<sup>144</sup> Surely Leopold felt that in order for these children to grow up and work effectively and efficiently in his colony they would need to be literate in and speak the Belgian national languages to understand commands. This is similar to Native American children in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who were sent to boarding schools to further their education. Yet, they were given new names and outfits, forced not to speak in their native language, and were taught Christianity and manual labor.<sup>145</sup> Thus the Congolese, like the Native American children in boarding schools, were educated to be loyal and eventually used to help Leopold extract more resources.

These Catholic mission schools worked in unison and under the authority of Leopold. As Fabian remarks, “Being involved in education, to the point of having a near monopoly of it, the missions worked indirectly, and often quite directly, for the promotion of private commercial and

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<sup>143</sup> Johannes Fabian, “Missions and the Colonization of African Languages: Developments in the Former Belgian Congo,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 17 (1983), 169.

<sup>144</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 241.

<sup>145</sup> Julie Davis, “Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives,” *OAH Magazine of History*, 15 (Winter, 2001), 20.

industrial interests.”<sup>146</sup> They taught children only what would be useful to Leopold and his development of the Congo. However, when one delves deep into some of the real reasons behind these Catholic schools they can find Leopold’s true exploitative intentions. On April 27, 1990, Leopold wrote, “I believe we must set up three children’s colonies. One in the Upper Congo near the equator, specifically military, with clergy for religious instruction and for vocational education. One at Leopoldville under clergy with a soldier for military training.”<sup>147</sup> Thus Leopold wanted future soldiers to help police their homeland that he took from them to exploit them even further. Leopold heavily subsidized these schools and further asked for a bigger recruitment of males that would strengthen his planned future army.<sup>148</sup>

Therefore, it was obvious that these schools were not popular among the Congolese. Hochschild even says that because of this, these schools mainly consisted of orphans and that “most of these “orphans” came from village raids where their parents had been killed.”<sup>149</sup> This exposes the unwillingness most families had about sending their children to these schools since most of the children went there because it was their last option and they had nobody else. Roger Casement, in his famous Casement Report, criticized Leopold’s Congo to a point it would later turn the world against Leopold. He also created the Congo Reform Association and with it a Commission to shed light on the numerous unethical and monstrous acts going on in the Congo. One observation the Commission had was, “conditions of the orphanages were often bad, and children were often held against their will, when they were at an age when they should have been

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>147</sup>Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 133.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

released. The methods used in collecting children ‘amounted to slave-raiding’.<sup>150</sup> Orphans were most likely the best case scenario as students for Leopold in these Catholic schools since they did not have to worry about being home with their families or even have their families take them out of the schools.

Another disastrous aspect of the schools was the high mortality rate. Hochschild notes, “Among the traumatized and malnourished children packed into both the state and Catholic colonies, disease was rife and the death rate high, often over 50 percent.”<sup>151</sup> One example is when a column of 108 boys forcefully walked to a state colony at Boma, in which sixty-two made it and eight others died a few weeks later.<sup>152</sup> The Catholic schools had no pragmatic response to these high death tolls. Instead, one mother superior of an all girls Catholic colony said, “Several of the little girls were so sickly on their arrival that ... our good sisters couldn’t save them, but all had their happiness of receiving Holy Baptism; they are now little angels in Heaven who are praying for our great king.”<sup>153</sup> This means that though they are sorry for the loss of the little girls, it is okay because they are now in Heaven, praying for King Leopold II, who in fact is responsible for these long and grueling marches from the children’s villages to the Catholic schools.

## **Red Rubber**

Since Leopold’s exploitation of ivory had finally caught up with him and the profits had nearly vanished, he needed something else in the Congo to raise revenue. The Dunlop Company

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<sup>150</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 214.

<sup>151</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 135.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

would provide him his golden apple, in the form of rubber. In 1890, they began making tires for bicycles and cars, and using rubber for other items like “hoses, tubing, gaskets, insulation for the telegraph, telephone, and electrical wiring.”<sup>154</sup> As all of these items were growing technologies, demand skyrocketed for rubber. It was also more beneficial to produce rubber than ivory or any other resource for Leopold. Didier Gondola, in *The History of Congo*, explains, “Rubber, unlike minerals, required no capital investment, no fertilizer, no heavy machinery—just a few steamers to transport the wild rubber and, most importantly, labor.”<sup>155</sup> Thus Leopold could sit on the sidelines and not have to spend hardly anything, hence gaining tremendous profits from its production which was something Leopold knew how to do well.

From the late 1880s to the early 1910s, rubber prices around the world had quadrupled.<sup>156</sup> Gondola states, “During this period, Africa’s supply of rubber went from 5 percent to nearly half the world’s total production, with Congo leading the way.”<sup>157</sup> Leopold had singlehandedly went from a minor leader of a minor country to one of the world’s richest and most powerful leaders. At this time, the Congo’s worth was valued at more than \$1 billion today, meaning it would be many times that back then. Leopold was now set. While every other European colonist colonized as a country, like Britain, Germany, and France, Leopold was reaping in pure profits to himself with no government or parliament to harass him on his unfair and exploitative practices in the Congo.

The main problem with the growth of rubber is that it usually grows in dense rainforests and its vines are thick and tangle up around tall trees. What made the rubber was the coagulated

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>155</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 66.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

sap that leaked from the vines once they were cut. However, as hundreds of vines were being cut around local villages, villagers had to trek further and further away for days to face harsh environments and hope to come home alive as the collection of sap was dangerous.<sup>158</sup> If it was raining they could slip off the trees and break limbs or die, which often happened. As Hochschild mentions, “Up to a foot thick at the base, a vine would twine upward around a tree to a hundred feet or more off the ground, There, branching, it might wind its way hundreds of feet through the upper limbs of another half-dozen trees.”<sup>159</sup> The period is called red rubber for a reason, for all the blood that was spilt.

The collection of rubber was also a negative effect for economic reasons. Gondola says, “Not only did rubber collection provide no profit, but it also caused a crisis of subsistence because villagers could not tend to their plots.”<sup>160</sup> This is significant because the Congolese were not repaid with food for their services, causing massive starvation in many villages. Due to the forced collection of the rubber ordered by Leopold, he kept generating astronomical profits. In 1905, Leopold made over 43 million Belgian francs, which again would be many times more today, off of more than 10 million pounds of rubber sap.<sup>161</sup> As a result of Leopold’s exploitative success, the Congolese had to risk their lives daily for rubber sap all the while facing massive starvation from not being able to tend their fields.

To highlight this exploitation, E.D. Morel, a British humanitarian who helped Roger Casement establish the Congo Reform Association, noticed something peculiar about the Belgian shipyards. Morel postulated:

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>159</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 162.

<sup>160</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 67.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

Of the imports going into the Congo something like 80% consisted of articles which were remote from trade purposes. Yet, the Congo was exporting increasing quantities of rubber and ivory for which, on the face of the import statistics, the natives were getting nothing or next to nothing. How, then, was this rubber and ivory being acquired? Certainly not by commercial dealing. Nothing was going in to pay for what was coming out.<sup>162</sup>

While the other countries had enacted policies of free trade and somewhat fairly exchanged goods with their colonies for resources, Leopold gave nothing back for his billion dollar business. As Morel said, nothing could pay for what Leopold had extracted or the economic and political turmoil that has affected the Congo since Leopold.

Morel also found another groundbreaking fact that European states were left unaware of. Morel discovered that instead of Leopold's philanthropic mission, as he had vowed with the General Act and with other conferences and organizations to end the slave trade and "civilize" the Congo, that he was in fact responsible for slavery in the Congo. Morel states, "labour of a terrible and continuous kind could alone explain such unheard-of profits ... forced labour in which the Congo Government was the immediate beneficiary."<sup>163</sup> From this point on, it was clear that Leopold was not just economically exploiting the Congo but physically as well using the lives of the Congolese to attain more sap from rubber.

### **Concession Companies**

Leopold knew he would need other entities to help him control his vast Congo. He could not control it alone with the tiny amount of Belgian officials that he was able to muster. Therefore, he sought the aid of capitalists whom headed concession companies, like the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company (ABIR) to help exploit the Congo. Gann and Duignan, in *The*

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<sup>162</sup>Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 180.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

*Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 1884-1914, say “In return for financial favors to the king, these men were able to obtain vast territorial concessions where they were allowed to raise armed forces of their own or to secure the assistance of the Force Publique.”<sup>164</sup> They all wanted a share of the enormous success of rubber, and were willing to collaborate and effectively exploit the Congo together. Yet Leopold made sure to exploit everything in the Congo, including the concession companies. Gann and Duignan add, “The concession companies of the various financiers were closely tied to the Free State, which either held half the shares in these ventures or became entitled to a fixed portion of their profits.”<sup>165</sup> The Congo was now deadlocked between multiple parties with armed forces willing to suppress them at any costs to exploit the Congo’s abundant resources.

These concession companies had distinct advantages that federal governments lacked. Robert Harms, in his article “The End of Red Rubber: A Reassessment,” explains, saying “Concession areas were less sensitive to world prices because the concession companies obtained rubber through coercion and did not pay current market rates.”<sup>166</sup> Similar to Leopold, these corporations had no regulations or governing bodies that could check their power and judge if they are behaving unethically. Moreover, Harms adds:

In these areas, the intensity of exploitation depended on the effectiveness of the coercion, and the freedom from interference by metropolitan politics. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch has shown that for one post in the French Congo, the graph of rubber production corresponds to the graph of cartridges expended to force the people to bring in rubber. When the post was forced to adopt less violent methods, its production dropped accordingly.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 127.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>166</sup> Robert Harms, “The End of Red Rubber: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of African History*, 16 (1975), 76.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore due to their coercive nature, they were able to speed up production and reduce costs. This all came at the expense of the Congolese of course, as the statement above shows the increase in cartridges expended correlating with the increase in production. Leopold had no regards for public sentiment with his exploitation of the Congo. Now that he was sovereign, he believed and did anything he could in the Congo to amass an exorbitant amount of wealth, even causing world demand to plummet as in the case of ivory.

The corporations were able to rob the Congo blind now that they had a firm foothold. Hochschild notes, “The [ABIR] spent 1.35 francs per kilo to harvest rubber in the Congo and ship it to the company’s headquarters at Antwerp- where it was sold for prices that sometimes reached 10 francs per kilo, a profit of more than 700 percent.”<sup>168</sup> These concession companies, like Leopold, were just given money through their coercive tactics on African villages. Nothing seemed to stop Leopold and these companies from their raw exploitation of resources from the Congo. When the world finally was able to see through Leopold’s lies and smokescreens near the end of his rule, he was still thinking about exploitation. Gondola mentions that Leopold was planning on making companies tap into Congo’s mineral wealth now that rubber had become so unpopular.<sup>169</sup> Although Leopold was ousted before this could happen, it foreshadowed the Congo’s fate as an enclave economy mainly relying on its minerals. Overall, the concession companies were able to add to Leopold’s stranglehold of the Congo, thus augmenting his vast wealth. He used this wealth and bought “A string of monuments, new palace wings, museums, and pavilions began going up all over Belgium”<sup>170</sup> These buildings were used as propaganda to

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<sup>168</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 160.

<sup>169</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 74.

<sup>170</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 168.



show his supposed respect and civilizing nature in the Congo. The only francs Leopold invested in the Congo were the Force Publique who would just do his dirty work and provide him his fortune.

### **Force Publique**

Leopold knew that no one in their right minds would openly hand him over the resources he wanted and he also knew that he did not want to pay for those resources. Hence, Leopold established the Force Publique in 1888 as a permanent military in the Congo to administer the extraction of resources and especially rubber. The majority of the Force Publique were initially Africans from Zanzibar and West Africa, though to save costs it began to recruit directly from the Congo.<sup>171</sup> The recruits consisted of freed slaves or conscripts, all under the leadership of white European officials.<sup>172</sup> Ewans notes, “by 1895 the Force amounted to some 6,000 men, 4,000 of them from the Congo itself, and by 1905 it numbered 16,000 men under 360 white officers, many of them Scandinavian.”<sup>173</sup> The growth of the Force Publique is in direct relation with the growth and resulting profits from rubber. This is important because it clearly highlights what Leopold’s main concern for the Congo was all along, a way to extract her resources using any means necessary. He was definitely an ends justify the means type of person.

### Rubber Quotas

Think of the Force Publique as less of a police force, which under most circumstances protects citizens, and more of a ruthless organization bent on doing anything to anyone to

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<sup>171</sup> Ewans, *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe*, 115.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

achieve its goals. Their goals were to force the Congolese in providing substantial rubber quotas each week. Their monstrous actions usually followed the same type of pattern with each village. Gondola states that the “soldiers began looting it in retaliation for the villagers’ refusal to carry out orders. The soldiers then attacked the villagers and seized their women, whom they declared as hostages until the chief could bring in the required quotas of rubber.”<sup>174</sup> Thus Leopold, through the Force Publique, was dismantling the Congolese way of life by using kidnapping as a means to get the men in each village to collect the rubber.

However, not only would the Force Publique engage in kidnapping, but while the men were gone they raped the women of each village they went. They even made the men, who had returned with the rubber, buy their women back for food that the villagers barely had since they were not allowed to tend their crops.<sup>175</sup> For any village who tried to revolt, Gondola adds, “At some villages, rubber squads forced men at gunpoint to rape their own mothers and sisters because they had refused to provide rubber.”<sup>176</sup> Thus, there was hardly anything for the Congolese to do other than to follow the Force Publique’s orders and work endlessly to obtain their rubber quotas.

Another notable method of attaining the rubber quotas was with the chopping off of hands if a village did not meet their exact quotas. The weight in rubber that was not fulfilled would be replaced with the weight of as many chopped off right hands as needed until the weight matched.<sup>177</sup> This reflects the type of lawlessness that was present in the Congo. Bruce B.

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<sup>174</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 68.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Bruce B. Mesquita, “Leopold II and the Selectorate: An Account in Contrast to a Racial Explanation,” *Historical Social Research*, 32 (2007) 213.

Mesquita, in his article “Leopold II and the Selectorate: An Account in Contrast to a Racial Explanation,” states, “One prominent officer in the Force Publique, Captain Leon Rom, was reported to have decorated the outer-perimeter of the flower-bed in front of his house with more than twenty human heads.”<sup>178</sup> In fact, Captain Leon Rom is often reported as being Joseph Conrad’s influence for Kurtz in his novel *The Heart of Darkness*. By giving the Force Publique full control over how to attain the rubber quotas, Leopold stripped any sense of human rights or dignity from them setting the region back centuries. For instance, Mesquita remarks:

Virtually nothing was invested in improving conditions in that hapless land. Roads were built only where they facilitated moving rubber to market. Laws protecting women and children or worker rights to strike were unheard of in the Congo Free State, even as Leopold promoted just such legislation in Belgium. Much as Leopold worried about protecting the security of his Belgian subjects, he worked to undermine the security of his Congolese subjects.<sup>179</sup>

With the Congo Free State, Leopold set the stage for a future riddled with bloodshed with no chance at an education or ability to govern themselves. The Congolese were both prisoners and slaves in their own home.

### **Death, Starvation, and Disease**

The death toll only increased as the time went on and as rubber became scarce as a result of most of the vines being cut and dead. A Swedish missionary in 1894 recorded a Congolese song that went, “We are tired of living under this tyranny. We cannot endure that our women and children are taken away and dealt with by the white savages. We shall make war.... We know that we shall die, but we want to die. We want to die.”<sup>180</sup> This is a song of hopelessness that

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 214.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 174.

emphasizes how dire the situation was and how little the Congolese could do to liberate themselves. Although this period under Leopold did not stop some Congolese from trying to escape from the Congo, usually in doing so at a costs. Hochschild states, “As they fled these expeditions, villagers sometimes abandoned small children for fear that their cries would give away their hiding places. As a result, many children starved.”<sup>181</sup> Not only did many die from starvation due to men having to go on rubber collecting expeditions and orphaned children that could not provide for themselves, but they were also forced into giving food to the Force Publique. Hochschild explains, “Hunger also struck villagers who did not flee into the forest, because if they were near a rubber post they had to give up much of their bananas, manioc, fish, and meat to feed the soldiers.”<sup>182</sup> The Congolese were treated as anything but civilized and more like expendable machines that were discarded once they were broken and beyond repair.

Without food and energy, families could not support themselves and grew frail and weak, causing millions to be more acceptable and to die from disease. The long treks of the male villagers and the conscription of villagers onto steamships or into the Force Publique made them travel long distances. The Belgians had only brought medicine for themselves, and through physical exhaustion the Congolese were increasingly subjected to multiple diseases. Smallpox and sleeping sickness caused the highest death toll, and it is estimated that half a million died from sleeping sickness in just 1901.<sup>183</sup> This had also had an effect on the birthrate. Roger Casement estimated that 60 percent of the population had dropped.<sup>184</sup> One Catholic missionary noticed the decline in population and upon his arrival at Lake Mai NDombe, a major rubber

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 232

district; he saw that there was a complete absence of children from ages seven to fourteen.<sup>185</sup>

Thus with a mixture of disease and as a result low birthrate, the deaths were mounting in Leopold's Congo that would have a severe impact on Congo's future.

The amount of murders and deaths from starvation, sleeping sickness, and disease all amounted to one of the world's worst tragedies. On the substantial violence, Hochschild says, "If a village refused to submit to the rubber regime, state or company troops or their allies sometimes shot everyone in sight, so that nearby villages would get the message."<sup>186</sup> This details the indiscriminate and immeasurable killings in the Congo that were unchecked by any authority. In the span of the Congo Free State, from 1885 to 1908, it is estimated that over 10 million Congolese had died. That was half the population of the Congo. The economy was shattered in the Congo and along with that any chance of it forming a military to defend itself was slim due to the massive depopulation. They now lacked workers who could rebuild burned villages or tend to farms that were destroyed due to soil erosion from the constant demands of crops for the Force Publique. The Congo was left in economic and political ruin that would affect it for more than a century later.

### **Consequences: Debt and Enclave Economy**

#### Debt

Due to this exploitation, the Congo gained an insurmountable amount of debt. This is evident during the Great Depression that affected Belgium and had trickled down to the Congo.

B. Jewsiewicki, in the article "The Great Depression and the Making of the Colonial Economic

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 230 and 232.

<sup>186</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 165.

System in the Belgian Congo,” states, “the Congolese budget turned into a typical colonial structure: 45 per cent of the budgetary expenditures went to interest on the colonial debt, with almost 40 per cent of the colonial revenue coming from Belgian loans.”<sup>187</sup> This demonstrates the viscous cycle that allows loaning organizations like the IMF and World Bank to make money. Belgium was loaning the Congolese money, and they had to work to not just pay back the loans but the swelling interest. Ironically, the Congo had to borrow money to pay off its debt.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, Jewsiewicki notes, “The price of agricultural products dropped abruptly while compulsory cultivation and taxes increased and the monopoly power of large trading companies expanded.”<sup>189</sup> Due to Leopold’s exploitative policies and Belgium’s temporary depression, the Congo had to undergo massive debt and become a plantation economy. The enlargement of these trading companies by Belgium and increased debt ensured that the Congo would continue to owe them money for decades to come.

In truth, the Congo Free State’s debt was worse than any other country in Africa. Gann and Duignan say, “It was the most debt-ridden of all European colonies in Africa, carrying a charge more than twice that of Nigeria, three times that of German East Africa, and more than eight times that of German East Africa.”<sup>190</sup> This speaks to the direct rule that Leopold and Belgium imposed rather than the indirect rule of most other European nations. Belgium was also able to transfer the Congo Free State’s debt of other entities to itself. Gann and Duignan expound on this transferred debt:

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<sup>187</sup> B. Jewsiewicki, “The Great Depression and the Making of the Colonial Economic System in the Belgian Congo,” *African Economic History*. No. 4 (Autumn, 1977) 160.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Gann and Duignan, *Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 155.

The Congolese taxpayer was left with responsibility not only for the Free State's debt of 110 million francs but also for a "gratitude fund" given to the king "in testimony for his great sacrifice in favor of the Congo created by him," as well as for another 40 million francs for the so-called Niederfulbach Foundation, one of the king's financial instruments, which was ultimately transferred to the Belgian state in 1923.<sup>191</sup>

Therefore, Belgium received millions of francs in debt owed to Leopold and debt owed to other organizations like the Niederfulbach Foundation. Instead of cancelling the debt that was amassed forcefully and unethically, Belgium only sought to increase the Congo Free State's debt which added to the taxation burden during the Great Depression.

### Enclave Economy

The exploitation by Leopold of ivory, rubber, and minerals near the end of his rule and the beginning of Belgian annexation set the stage for the Congo's enclave economy today. David K. Leonard and Scott Strauss, in their book *Africa's Stalled Development: International Causes and Cures*, explain in depth the consequences of an enclave economy. Leonard and Strauss state, "Enclave production entails export of primary produce (usually extractive) that are generated in a small area. In Africa, the prevalent forms of enclave production are mining, oil drilling, and agricultural production on the estates of large corporations."<sup>192</sup> Therefore the production of the state's wealth is only concentrated in a small area and thus cuts off any chances of wealth for most of the population. They also note, "Most states on the continent have a tax base that is both overwhelmingly on exports, and many derive most of their export income from enclave production, making the latter "enclave economies."<sup>193</sup> This means that the state's like the Congo

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>192</sup> Leonard and Strauss, *Africa's Stalled Development*, 12.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

are relatively still exporting much more than importing, which hurts most of the population as they are not getting money from those export sales and are not getting money or goods in return from imports.

Enclave economies also do not have to care about domestic production and concerns over the welfare of its people. Leonard and Strauss indicate, “Two other general features of enclave economies should be stressed at the outset: first, that enclave economies are “rentier,” and second that they do not depend on widespread productivity in the population.”<sup>194</sup> Concession companies only need to pay taxes to the state and the state can use that money to invest in more enclave production. Thus the government has no need or use in the ‘widespread production’ of its people. Furthermore, Ernst Vohsen, a German humanitarian, states, “Under such a regime ... the indigenous people had nothing left to sell. The Congolese peoples, given this state of affairs, could never develop into “a nation of customers.””<sup>195</sup> The Congolese were not able to produce anything for profit and hence could not even afford to buy goods and make a living.

Without a large job industry, the society cannot afford social services like education and healthcare and are left powerless to fund any type of social movements that could change the regime. On this point, Leonard and Strauss remark, “An enclave ... allows personal rule to sustain itself over the long run because enclaves themselves are susceptible to state predation and because enclaves do not depend on widespread productivity for their sustenance.”<sup>196</sup> Due to the absence of a check on its authority, the king or ruler could sit on the throne exempt of any fear of widespread discontent or revolts. This was the case with Mobutu in his decades of dictatorship in

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>195</sup> Gann and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 137.

<sup>196</sup> Leonard and Strauss, *Africa's Stalled Development*, 13.



the Congo. During his reign, 99 percent or 39 million people faced a ‘disintegrated economy’ while the sole profits of enclave production went to him and his clients and the concession companies.<sup>197</sup>

Another substantial problem of enclave economies is that they do not have to tax its society to generate its wealth. Leonard and Strauss explain, “Taxes on the general populace are unpopular and thus create a negative incentive to balance the political attractions of any patronage they finance. Rents from enclaves are painless to the average citizen.”<sup>198</sup> Without taxes, the populace is disconnected from the government and has little control on where the money goes. In the United States, discussions on taxes usually abound where it is being spent and if such spending is worth it to the public.

This is directly relevant to the Congo because the Congolese cannot have these discussions. They cannot argue about wasteful government spending because the money is not coming from them at all. Hence, as Leonard and Strauss point out that an economy where “production is multivalent rather than concentrated, state revenue is proportionate to the degree of wealth dispersion. Not so where production is confined to enclaves: there wealth concentration is the norm.”<sup>199</sup> This means that as long as wealth is concentrated in mining, oil, and other geographical resources, the people’s wealth is unimportant to the state. Without taxes, the people are left with no links to the administration and must sit helplessly as the government or dictator in this case of the Congo, amasses limitless wealth off of resources where only small production is necessary.

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

### Inability of Self-Rule

As a result of King Leopold II's colonization of the Congo Free State and then Belgium's annexation of the Congo from Leopold, the Congolese were left with no ability to successfully rule over themselves. After a series of revolts, Belgium finally granted the Congo its independence in 1960. However, when independence came there were less than 30 university graduates in the Congo.<sup>200</sup> Hochschild states, "There were no Congolese army officers, engineers, agronomists, or physicians."<sup>201</sup> Thus they had no people who were specialized in military affairs, construction, farming, or healthcare which are all vital to any government. Furthermore, Hochschild notes, "The colony's administration had made few other steps toward a Congo run by its own people: of some five thousand management-level positions in the civil service, only three were filled by Africans."<sup>202</sup> Only three Africans out of millions in the Congo had administrative experience. This is a dilemma because it hinders the growth of businesses as there is no one who could lead them.

### Mobutu and the Kabila's

The policies of King Leopold II allowed for future rulers to dictate over the Congo and further extract its resources. After Belgium left the Congo they placed Joseph Mobutu, otherwise known as Mobutu Sese Seko, in power. He would change the Congo's name to Zaire and act as its dictator for the next thirty-two years from 1965 to 1997. Although it looked like he wanted to

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<sup>200</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 381.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

increase nationalistic tendencies by mandating that each city and person change their name to traditional African names, Mobutu ran the Congo into poverty and corruption. He brutally suppressed any protests and through a policy called Zairianization, he expropriated land and businesses to his family members and friends. Thanks to the support of Belgium, he was able to sit comfortably atop his throne and not worry about industrializing and setting up public infrastructure. Mobutu's brutal suppression of ethnic tribes like the Tutsis caused a massive civil war, in which Mobutu would be overthrown by Laurent Kabila who ruled from 1997 through 2001.

Laurent Kabila ended up being no different than Mobutu by withholding elections and symbolizing corruption. Civil wars were still raging over ethnic divides but mainly over Congo's ungaurded resources. Emizet F. Kisangani, in his article "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Mosaic of Insurgent Groups," states, "the Congo conflict created a new idea of predation in which looting a neighbor's resources without attempting to conquer the neighbor was deemed acceptable by the international community."<sup>203</sup> Laurent Kabila would be assassinated and replaced by his son Joseph Kabila, who is now the current ruler of the renamed Democratic Republic of Congo, marking the Congo's sixth name change in just over a century.

Joseph Kabila continues to withhold elections and exploit Congo's resources without providing for the Congolese society. Benjamin Pauker, in his article "The Fog of Words," mentions that "each presidential candidate had to pay roughly \$50,000 as an entry fee, this in a country where the per capita gross national product is roughly \$2 a day."<sup>204</sup> Besides rigged

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<sup>203</sup>Emizet F. Kisangani, "Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Mosaic of Insurgent Groups" *International Journal on World Peace*, 20 (September 2003), 51.

<sup>204</sup> Benjamin Pauker, "The Fog of Words" *World Policy Journal*, 24 (Spring, 2007), 106.

elections, Joseph Kabila wanted to make it nearly impossible for any popular rival candidates to be elected. Kabila's rule has been mired in civil conflict like all of the dictators before him. The University of Iowa Center for Human Rights, in the article "Human Rights Index," discusses the necessity of 18,000 United Nations peacekeepers to try to prevent conflict in the Congo. The article states that over 370,000 people were displaced in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2006, the year Joseph Kabila took office, due to armed conflict with Kabila and rebels.<sup>205</sup> This harkens back to all of the refugees that were apparent with Leopold's Congo Free State due to the Force Publique and exploitation. Pauker mentions "without the massive UN presence, Congo would disintegrate once again, sparking a new cycle of violence."<sup>206</sup> Thus it is clear that it is these UN peacekeepers that are largely keeping the Congo from collapsing due to an ineffective government. Although Mobutu and the Kabila family are dictators in their own right, who used brutal and exploitative tactics to suppress their own people, the stage was set for them by King Leopold II's colonization and exploitation of the Congo.

### Education

The lack of education in the Congo Free State proved more severe. As Gondola states in *The History of Congo*, "Accordingly, academic training provided Congolese with nothing more than a veneer of moral education based on Catholic principles and the technical skills necessary to create a lower middle class."<sup>207</sup> Therefore the Congolese were basically getting an education on religion and how to work in trades, like mining or farming. Instead of expanding the minds of

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<sup>205</sup> University of Iowa Center for Human Rights, "Human Rights Index" *The Iowa Review* 39 (Spring 2009), vi.

<sup>206</sup> Pauker, "The Fog of Words," 106.

<sup>207</sup> Gondola, *The History of Congo*, 13.

children and imbuing the ability to critically think for themselves, the Congo Free State made them loyal with religion and making them future workers for their concession companies to extract resources. In addition, Gondola points to Mobutu's rule and says this Eurocentric education still continued. He notes, "French continued to be emphasized as the language of education at the expense of African languages, and Catholic schools are still predominant to this day."<sup>208</sup> This is almost like cultural genocide. The Congolese were still unable to freely communicate in their own native languages and had to speak the national language of Belgium even though Mobutu, who ironically led an authenticity campaign of reverting the names implanted by Europe back to Congolese.

Moreover, Mobutu feared the educated part of the society and sought to have them dismantled to secure his kleptocracy. Often he would close down schools for years at a time to stamp out civil unrest.<sup>209</sup> This kept enrollment in schools relatively low. As Gondola says that the percentage was "78 percent for primary schools and 23 percent for secondary schools in 1990."<sup>210</sup> This again proves the connection between Leopold and Belgium's Congo to Mobutu's in that so few Congolese were graduates of secondary schools and universities. Thus it is evident that due to Leopold's colonial rule and methods on education that the Congolese suffered in the long term by consistently being denied access to a real education. Without an educated populace, the chance at effectively ruling over a country with complex political and economic systems is practically void.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

### Health Care

Due to the lack of spending on social institutions like education and health care, the Congo's health care industry plummeted and will more likely make a patient worse off than before they came in with wounds, disorders, or diseases. Gondola writes, "The most potent symbol of this failure is the country's public hospitals, where patients have to bring in their own medicines and, in some instances, to share beds and sheets with other patients."<sup>211</sup> Since Leopold, Belgium, or Mobutu never needed to make regulation agencies, the unsanitary conditions of the hospitals only increased with time. Also, since they have to share beds and sheets, diseases are more likely to spread making it almost contradictory to even go to the hospital. Furthermore, the patients have to pay for their own medicine because no insurance is provided. This would cost a lot to a Congolese who is most likely without work or at least work that pays a minimum wage. Gondola states, "This has created a situation in which access to health care is reserved for the wealthier members of the population, who can afford the expensive private health care system."<sup>212</sup> Therefore, the majority of Congolese do not have access to such vital institutions like hospitals or public health centers that ensure ones livelihood and survival.

### Foreign Aid and Debt

With many African states in economic shambles due to the colonial era, many Western countries are now bestowing boundless amounts of foreign aid. However, the consequences are

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 12.

that most of these African dictators, like Mobutu and the Kabila's, use this foreign aid on themselves and their regime. In addition, Leonard and Strauss input, "Foreign aid organizations like the overseas development assistance (ODA) creates a system in which state revenue does not depend on a functioning economy."<sup>213</sup> These dictatorships like in the Congo are able to stay in power and not have to provide a functioning economy thanks to foreign aid.

Instead of foreign aid, countries and organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank should be offering debt cancellation. Today, after years of debt relief the Congo is over 6 billion dollars in debt which takes up about 22 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, before massive debt relief, the Congo's debt was about 26 billion dollars which took up about 135 percent of its GDP in 2000.<sup>214</sup> This shows that before intervention, the Congo suffered literally an unpayable debt. Yet as much as intervention helped, it should not have been needed at all. The Congo's debt is a direct link back to Leopold's exploitative Congo Free State. Once a country's debt cannot be repaid, as Leonard and Strauss state, "its policymakers have no incentive to undertake difficult reforms."<sup>215</sup> With no reforms comes any self-improvement in government, and that means much of the same dictatorial rule for the Congo until its debt can be wiped out completely.

## **Final Thoughts**

King Leopold II, through his ability to deceitfully acquire the Congo using philanthropic smokescreens and his ability to institute extensive forced labor resembling slavery, he set the

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<sup>213</sup> Leonard and Strauss, *Africa's Stalled Developments*, 18.

<sup>214</sup> "Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject," *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>215</sup> Leonard and Strauss, *Africa's Stalled Development*, 28.

stage for the Congo's ethnic, political, and economic turmoil. His actions helped disband some of the Congo's most powerful kingdoms like the Luba, Lunda, and the Kongo. These kingdoms provided stability to a vast region and maintained an efficient administration that was connected to even the smallest of villages through councils for provinces, districts, and chiefdoms. With the annexation of the Congo by Belgium, which was only possible through Leopold's previous ownership, they disbanded more tribes and as stated would cause massive ethnic wars among the many ethnic groups competing for power in the Congo's independence of 1960.

Politically, Leopold ensured that the Congolese would not have a chance at self-rule for over a century. Belgian rule lasted for almost 60 years and continued the policies of Leopold. They granted land to concession companies, who all together extracted billions of dollars worth of resources that were never paid back. The Congolese were deprived of any positions in the administration and due to a lack of education would almost be inept at self-rule from the lack of training. The transition to Mobutu after Belgian rule also put the Congo in decades of dictatorial rule. Although Joseph Mobutu or Mobutu Sese Seko was born in the Congo, he was very much a puppet for the Western powers who assassinated the publicly elected Lumumba in 1961 to put him there. Then with the Kabila family in power today, it looks like the Congo is following the same political repression and lack of civil rights and equality that existed in Leopold's Congo Free State. The Congo was never given the chance of having a representative democracy where people could vote for candidates who in turn would serve their best interests. Instead, due to Leopold's rule, the Congo was placed in a quagmire of authoritarian rule and dictatorships which continue to prevail.



Economically, the Congo has suffered more than most states. Leopold created a policy of forced labor and those laborers were paid next to nothing for their hard work. The Congo was turned into an enclave economy that was solely developed for extraction of resources. Belgium also made the Congo a plantation economy demanding huge quantities of crops especially during World War I and the Great Depression. This in turn forced the Congo to take loans from Belgium to pay for their own resources. Yet, combined with interest, these loans could never possibly be paid back without a functioning domestic economy. As Leonard and Strauss mentioned above, with an enclave economy, Leopold, Belgium, Mobutu, nor the Kabila's would have to provide for domestic production or social institutions as the wealth of the people were not in relation to the wealth of the state. Without an effective job industry, the Congolese could never pay back the debt inherited by early Belgian rule. Therefore, according to the dictators, reforms were unnecessary and hence the Congolese continued to be subjugated by poverty.

If one wants to study the current turmoil of the Congo, all they have to do is to look back in its history to see how greatly King Leopold II shaped its society. They will discover a person bent on colonial acquisition that ushered in an era of forced labor and exploitation that subsequent rulers would follow. With the brutal Force Publique, Leopold committed atrocities that greatly disintegrated village life and chances at self-government. The pre-colonial kingdoms were dismantled and any protest movement or revolts were shut down quickly by each regime who would rule over the Congo.

This is why it is crucial to study and understand former leaders especially in less developed countries. On the importance to remember King Leopold II, Hochschild recalls one poem that read:

No zeal, no Faith, inspired this Leopold,  
Nor any madness of half-splendid birth.  
Cool-eyed, he loosed the hounds that rend and slay,  
Just that his coffers might be gorged with gold.  
Embalm him, Time! Forget him not, O Earth,  
Trumpet his name, and flood his deeds with day.<sup>216</sup>

This is the reason why it is so important to study past figures like Leopold because they are inextricably linked to parts of the present. With the teachings of the history of Leopold and his actions in the Congo absent in most high school curriculums, it is imperative that people take it upon themselves to learn about such a deplorable part of history that is just as important as Hitler's Germany.

Thus, it is clear why Joseph Conrad, in his famous novel *Heart of Darkness* that sparked outcry of what was happening in the Congo, made the character Kurtz. He was an agent for a trading company who was sent to collect ivory. As already mentioned, some people note that Kurtz was inspired by Leon Rom who was an official for the Force Publique and had a fence around his house made up of more than twenty African heads in the Congo. Thus Kurtz's famous dying words, "The horror! The horror!" comes to no surprise at the sheer amount of atrocities rampant in the Congo from Leopoldian rule.<sup>217</sup> Hopefully one day there can be a character written, based on real life, that visits the Congo and speaks of the liberal economic policies of the representative and democratic government. With debt cancellation being a start and the rise of social media that can connect people and ideas across extensive distances, perhaps one day this type of Congo will come to fruition.

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<sup>216</sup>Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 215.

<sup>217</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 115.

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